

The Development of the Post-Classical Hollywood Sports Business Film Trend: A Socio-Historic Approach

By

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the development of an emerging trend in contemporary sports film production identified as the post-classical Hollywood sports business film. Post-classical Hollywood sports business films stand in contrast to their classical Hollywood sports film predecessors based on some distinguishing characteristics relating to different points of narrative emphasis, themes, and character types. Initially, post-classical sports business film narratives focus primarily on the business side of professional team sports rather than themes devoted to athletes achieving on the field of play in the world of sports. As a result, much of the filmic action in post-classical Hollywood sports business films occurs in business setting such as offices and board rooms rather than in sports stadiums, arenas, or playing fields typical of classical era sports films. Finally, non-athlete sports film protagonists (NASP) in post-classical Hollywood sports business films have supplanted athlete protagonists as the main characters in this new sports film trend, with athlete characters occupying supporting roles in the overall narratives.

The focus of this study concentrates on two stages of development in the post-classical Hollywood sports business film. After providing a brief history classical sports films, the first stage of development in this new trend is identified as taking place starting from the late 1960s and continuing to the mid 1990s. During this time period, an increasing number of Hollywood sports business films featured matters of sports economics and other off-the-field matters related to professional team sports as significant components of the narrative. In addition, athlete protagonists, in contrast to their classical era predecessors, began to show greater concern for

their personal careers rather than helping their teams win championships. The second stage of development initiated with the film *Jerry Maguire* in the mid 1990s, which signaled the appearance of the non-athlete sports film protagonist (NASP) as one of the most distinguishing traits of the post-classical Hollywood sports business film trend that continues into the 21st century. Moreover, *Jerry Maguire* (1996) exists as the prototypical sports business film, and marks a crucial turning point in Hollywood production leading to the development of the ensuing trend and potential sports film sub-genre.

This study takes a socio-historic approach drawing on Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery's historiographical methods from *Film History: Theory and Practice* (1985) in examining a range of contemporaneous economic, political, and social generative mechanisms is facilitating the rise of the post-classical Hollywood sports business film trend. Using discursive textual analysis of certain post-classical Hollywood sports business films, this study positions the spread of neoliberalism and free market principles as significant generative mechanisms in the appearance of distinctive representations, themes, and narrative elements evident in post-classical Hollywood sports business film trend. Film such as *Bang the Drum Slowly* (John D. Hancock, 1973), *North Dallas Forty* (Ted Kotcheff, 1979), *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996), and *Moneyball* (Bennett Miller, 2011) among others, are examined as examples of post-classical Hollywood sports business films exhibiting these new themes and narrative patterns.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In the film *Moneyball* (Bennett Miller, 2011) Oakland Athletics general manager Billy Beane, played by Brad Pitt, enters a busy conference room filled with his team of baseball talent scouts, many of whom are visibly at least 20 years his senior, to discuss the new roster for the upcoming season. The lead scout, whose deeply wrinkled face is dappled with sun-damaged age spots, provides Beane with a list of potential replacements for all-star first baseman Jason Giambi, whom the team lost to the New York Yankees through free agency. He asks Beane, “Who do you want to talk about first?” Waiting for Billy Beane to respond, the scout, crewing a wad of tobacco, picks up a vending machine coffee cup, spits in the cup, and replaces it on the conference table. After a brief pause, Beane states, “None of them.” Beane continues, “You guys are still trying to replace Giambi; we can’t do it. What we might be able to do is to recreate him in the aggregate.” He informs them that they might accomplish this by finding three players with the same on-base average as their top three players from last season, Jason Giambi, Johnny Damon, and Olmedo Saenz, but at a fraction of the salary. The scouts are incredulous and express that Beane’s approach is ludicrous and futile. The lead scouts openly challenges Beane stating, “So let me get this straight; you’re not going to bring in one, but three defective players to replace Giambi?” Another scout asks Beane, “You’re not buying into this Bill James bullshit, are you?” Undaunted, Beane declares “This is the new direction of the Oakland A’s. We are card counters at the blackjack table, and we are going to turn the odds on the casino.”

The scene described above not only elaborates on this controversial method of baseball player selection, based on Sabermetrics—devised by Bill James—which is becoming more common in modern day Major League Baseball operations, but it also embodies and illustrates a

new trend in American sports films. This study examines the development of this emerging trend in American sports films, hereafter referred to as the American sports business film, that feature the business of sports as the primary narrative framework. While elements of business, money, corruption, and gambling have been featured in sports films—especially boxing films such as *The Champ* (King Vidor, 1932), *Golden Boy* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1939), and *Champion* (Mark Robson, 1949) among many others—American sports films focusing primarily on professional sports team economics emerged as a recognizable trend starting in the 1970s.

Starting with films such as *Bang the Drum Slowly* (John D. Hancock, 1973) and *Bingo Long and the Traveling All Stars and Motor Kings* (John Badham, 1976), and continuing into the 21st century with popular films such as *Moneyball* (2011) and *Million Dollar Arm* (2014), the American sports business film has developed into a discernable pattern and sub-genre in contemporary Hollywood production. These films warrant attention because they represent an identifiable pattern in a growing number of American sports films, specifically through an increased focus on narrative elements that 1) center on the business operations of professional sports teams and 2) shift to non-athlete protagonists as the primary film heroes representative of neoliberal free market capitalism.¹ In addressing these American sports business films, this study identifies key socio-historic events in the United States during the 1970s and into the 21st century in order to highlight specific social, economic, and political generative mechanisms that possibly affected the occurrence of the common themes, narrative elements, and filmic representations evident in this new sports filmic trend.

¹ The title “non-athlete protagonists” includes characters identified as professional sports agents—i.e., business professionals who negotiate athlete contracts—but also those non-athlete film characters who operate as representatives of professional sports team ownership in various capacities such as general manager, etc. Assigning this title is an obvious oversimplification; however, it does provide a common, shorthand referent for the purposes of this study.

The central research question guiding this study regarding the appearance and development of the American sports business film as a distinct trend is as follows:

What economic, social, and cultural factors contributed to the narrative and thematic developments of the American sports business film production during the 1970s—2000s?

Addressing this question involves an interdisciplinary methodological approach, drawing on various concepts from sociology, cultural studies, and economics in conjunction with film and media studies. This study follows a socio-historic approach in order to provide a more comprehensive analysis of this trend in American sports films, focusing on the social, political, and cultural milieu surrounding their production as potential generative mechanisms in shaping their content, narrative structures, and thematic elements. In addition, this study identifies and elaborates on the common themes, narrative formulas, and character representations in order to examine various conflicting ideological issues at work in these films. For instance, Deborah Tudor suggests that American sports film narratives often sidestep contradictions that exist in the world of sports, such as “natural talent versus hard work, individuality versus team identity, and wining at all costs versus fair play” (xvii). Tudor continues, “unlike real life, both sports and popular cinema are perceived as functioning in an orderly fashion and presented as simple and easy to grasp” (xii). This study specifically analyzes how American sports business films represent these contradictions in narrative form in order to provide a nuanced reading of the various themes extant in these American sports business films. In addition, this study examines the ways in which American sports business films address, represent, and engage with specific socio-historic events that informed pertinent thematic elements in order to examine their ideological perspectives in relation to the world of sports and how this world is presented in popular cinema.

As previously indicated, many sports films incorporate components of the business world in their narrative structures. For the purposes of this study, the sports business film is identified and defined as films wherein the financial issues of sports, usually a conflict between athletes and team owners and their representatives or other aspects of the business side of professional sports, are the primary narrative structuring devices. Prior to the 1970s, most American sports films followed a traditional hero quest narrative formula. In these films, the narrative involves athlete-heroes pursuing the American Dream, as embodied by their athletic achievements through team play in sporting competition without a primary emphasis on the business side of the featured sport. In contrast, American sports business films produced after the 1970s began to place greater narrative importance on the business side of sports, along with representing the sports heroes concerned with their personal careers and well-being rather than solely identifying with their sports teams. This study identifies these narrative shifts as important milestones in the development of the American sports business films produced from the 1970s to the 21st century.

This study positions two important stages in the narrative development of the American sports business film as primary sites of analysis. Initially, American sports films produced in the 1970s—1990s, such as *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1973), *Rollerball* (Norman Jewison, 1975), *The Natural* (Barry Levinson, 1984), and *A League of Their Own* (Penny Marshall, 1992), among others, began to feature the business side of sports as a more common narrative element. Along with an increased emphasis on the economics of professional sports, many of the American sports business films produced during this time frame display a critical narrative shift wherein the athlete main characters focus on their individual identity rather than direct allegiance with their team. This often occurs when athlete characters attempt to take charge of their own financial futures and or personal health as part of the main narrative, as evidenced in *Bang the*

Drum Slowly and *North Dallas Forty* (Ted Kotcheff, 1979), respectively. Another key narrative element in the American sports business films produced during this time period was an increased appearance of a corporate villain, as represented through professional sports team ownership and management. William Palmer in *The Films of the Seventies: A Social History* (1987) speaks to this wider trend in American film production across the board during the “seventies and eighties [where] the new Hollywood conception of the villain had gone corporate” (30-31). This new emphasis on the corporate villain, along with the athlete hero narrative variations described above, were both hallmarks of the American sports business films of the 1970s-1990s, which exist in contrast to the American sports business films produced during the 1990-2000s.

The second stage of development starts in the mid 1990s with the seminal film *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996) and continues with other American sports business films produced in the 2000s such as *The Replacements* (Howard Deutch, 2000), *Moneyball* (Bennett Miller, 2011), and *Million Dollar Arm* (Craig Gillespie, 2014). This new trend in the American sports business film features a key shift in narrative emphasis away from professional athletes as the main characters and towards non-athlete sports business agents as the film protagonists. In these films, the non-athlete sports business agents undergo the typical hero’s quest once reserved for the athlete protagonists in sports films produced prior to this recent trend. *Jerry Maguire* stands as an important object of study because it marks the earliest formation of a definitive non-athlete sports film protagonist as the main point of narrative emphasis in a popular Hollywood film. More importantly, as both a critical and box office success, *Jerry Maguire* served as a template for future Hollywood sports film productions incorporating the economics of professional team sports through a plot driven by the actions of a non-athlete main character as an enduring trend and potential sports film sub-genre.

Another demonstrable shift in sports business films produced during the 1990s—2000s is that they frequently exhibit narratives and characters supporting the United States’ adaptations to the global economy in terms of free market economics and neoliberalism. These new themes emphasize on individual effort as the primary mark of achievement and advancement, and that collective action is not only unnecessary, but often an impediment to individual success in the world of modern capitalism. In addition, sports business films produced during this second stage of development often feature representations of social and political forces that stand in opposition to free market/neoliberal ideologies and practices, such as organized labor, in a marginalized and unfavorable fashion. In many of these films, characters affiliated with labor unions are positioned as the films’ antagonists or the main villains. In these instances, the cinematic athletes heroes are portrayed as “grateful” for the opportunity to play for whatever the owner is willing to pay them, which is in sharp contrast to the ways in which the “greedy” athletes are represented who attempt to negotiate a higher salary through their trade union or personal sports agent with team ownership. As such, the new American sports business film villain is often embodied through these greedy athlete characters who are often pitted against heroic figures representing the interests of team ownership. In this way, the concept of the corporate villain flips in favor of portraying team owners and managers—the sports representatives of corporate America—as either benign forces simply concerned with running a profitable business, or as openly sympathetic characters with humanistic qualities as sites of audience identification that, in many ways, elides the need for athlete heroes.

Socio-Historic Events as Thematic Generative Mechanisms in American Sports Films

In *Film History: Theory and Practice* (1993), Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery assert, “The historian’s study of the past seeks to explain why a particular set of historical

circumstances came about and with what consequences” (6). Furthermore, the authors claim, “Historical change in film might be attributed to the actions of powerful individual economic forces, aesthetic fate, or social pressures, depending on what factors each historian sees as being the most determinant in film history” (Allen and Gomery 8). Allen and Gomery also suggest that certain generative mechanisms or causative factors can account for the appearance of certain types of films, thematic trends, and narrative patterns in a body of films, which can come in the forms of economic, social, aesthetic, and technological forces. (16). This study adopts a similar approach to examine some of the generative mechanisms that could have led to the development of the American sports business film as a distinct production trend in the sports film genre.

This study hypothesizes that the emergence and development of the American sports business film as a distinct trend coincides with certain sociological and economic developments in the United States in the latter part of the twentieth century and into the 21st century. Among the earliest and most influential American socio-historic generative mechanisms explored in these films is the Curt Flood Free Agency case of 1972, which opened the door allowing professional athletes to have more negotiating power over their own salaries through free agency. The Curt Flood Case set in motion a monumental change in the world of American professional sports that led to an increasing number of high-profile players no longer staying with a single team for their entire careers and moving from team to team based on which one would offer the highest salary. This development in American professional sports became a more commonly featured narrative element in American sports business film starting in the 1970s and continued into the twenty-first century. In these American sports business films, the concept of free agency brought on by the Curt Flood Case is positioned as one of the most important socio-historic generative mechanisms that marked a recognizable narrative shift away from athlete film heroes

identifying with their team as a mark of success to them focusing on the advancement of their own professional sports careers as their primary narrative motivation.

Along with free agency and the Curt Flood Case of 1972, this study identifies the various work stoppages and player's strikes, including the National Football League's player strikes of 1982 and 1987 along with Major League Baseball's 1994-95 player strike, as important socio-historic generative mechanisms that affected the narrative content of American sports business films thereafter. These events all figure as significant factors that contributed to the eventual public vilification of the professional athlete players' associations and unions, which appeared in a wide range of popular culture representations exhibiting unfavorable sentiments towards organized labor in general.² In many of the American sports business films under examination for this study, themes relating to labor versus management/team ownership begin to take on greater significance with films produced starting in the 1970s and into the early 1990s. Moreover, with the American sports business films produced in the mid-1990s to the 2000s, a recognizable narrative shift occurs in these films in portraying athletes associated with labor unions in an unfavorable light while simultaneously elevating sports team owners or other representatives of the management side of professional sports—sports business agents—as the main film protagonists. This narrative development in American sports business films is indicative of the often one-sided negative public perception of labor unions in general during this time frame through various mass media outlets. In these films, sports union representatives are unsympathetic “thugs” or selfish individuals exclusively concerned with their own personal gain without regard for the sports team's best interests, or how the strikes affected sports fans.

² News reports on the 1994-1995 Major League Baseball strike often showed fans expressing that the players should be grateful that their jobs involve playing a game for a living or that they should be willing to play for free (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGf48SXz5Jk>).

Another important potential socio-historic generative mechanism that helped shape the content and narrative structure of the American sports business film was the gradual introduction and spread of neoliberalism and free market philosophies as dominant political and economic forces in the United States starting in the 1980s. One of the results of this occurred in a shift from athlete heroes to non-athlete sports business agent heroes becoming more common in post-classical Hollywood sports films, especially in those films produced during the second stage of development in the American sports business film. Ultimately, it is the intention of this study to show that the American sports business films produced in the 1990s-2000s mark a prominent Hollywood film trend and new sub-genre driven by specific concepts and generative mechanisms related to the spread of free market economics and neoliberalism in the United States and their affects on popular culture and mass media in that same time frame.

Allen and Gomery assert, “The film historian recognizes that the event [or events] under study are not one-dimensional things but points of convergence for various lines of historical forces or generative mechanisms” (17). In analyzing American sports business films, this study examines the interaction of the aforementioned historical events in American society as important generative mechanisms that could have affected the reconfiguration of the American sports film genre. This is especially important regarding the narrative shift from athlete heroes to non-athlete sports business agent heroes along with other pertinent thematic elements in terms of these socio-historic generative mechanisms. Through this reshaping of character focus from the athlete hero to the non-athlete sports business agent hero, the American sports business films of the 21st century can operate as sites of audience identification in support of neoliberalism—most especially the importance of individual responsibility in favor of collective action as a necessary course of action in achieving the American Dream. This subtle shift in character emphasis in

these American sports films is significant in the way it helps re-configure public perception of the connection between filmic sports heroes and this neoliberal interpretation of the American Dream. Furthermore, this study asserts that this trend in American sports films will continue placing greater narrative emphasis on the business side of sports, often eschewing athletes as the primary film heroes in subsequent popular Hollywood films.

Literature Review

The literature review is organized by an increasing specificity of sports films scholarship, starting with general scholarship regarding the basic elements of the sports films genre and then subsequent sports film literature that explore more specific topics and themes relating to various political, economic, ideological, and social issues evident in sports cinema. Literature regarding aspects of neoliberalism and free market economics in the latter part of the 20th century illustrate these concepts as potential generative mechanisms in the appearance of specific representations and thematic elements in post-classical Hollywood sports business films as a new trend. The following sports film scholarship coupled with literature outlining neoliberalism's influences in the United States help qualify the forthcoming analysis regarding post-classical sports business films as significant media artifacts indicative of free market philosophies on popular culture.

An increasing amount of scholarship has been written on various elements of sports in American cinema. Ronald Bergan's *Sports and Movies* (1982) provides a general analysis of sports as a source of narrative inspiration in American cinematic history. In this text, the author emphasizes the connection between sports and popular American cinema starting from the early days of silent film to the cinema of the late 1970s. Bergan indicates, "Sports have always been part of the American entertainment history and their representation is very much allied to the razzle-dazzle of show business, so it is not strange that movies are easily drawn to sports as

subjects” (4). In addition, Bergan explores the sociological importance of both sports and cinema by suggesting, “Sports, as an integral element in social life, illuminate much of the character of a people. Their depiction [sports] in movies, aside from purely entertainment value, provides insights into the psychology of a nation” (13). Bergan covers sports films produced before the 1980s, which obviously limits its’ scope in speaking to developing social issues as represented and explored through sports cinema. It offers a good starting point in examining the both the utility of sports as narrative inspiration and the sociological and ideological dimensions evident in American sports cinema.

Deborah Tudor’s *Hollywood’s Vision of Team Sports* (1997) provides insight into the ideological and hegemonic dimensions of the confluence between sports and cinema in American culture. Much of the author’s analysis focuses on the different types of sports film heroes from various points in cinematic history in order to show that specific socio-historic generative mechanisms affected the ways in which sports heroes are represented in American sports films. Tudor bases her claims on numerous scholars, including Ronald Bergan by citing his view that “sports function as a sector of culture from which films draw crucial subject matter” (xiii). Tudor further asserts that “Sports creates and nourishes North American myths and legends and this material is then used by movies” (xii). Drawing on Louis Althusser’s *Ideological State Apparatuses: Lenin, and Philosophy and other Essays* (1971), Tudor points out that “Marxist analysis of the institutions of sport often view them as participating in the interpellation of individuals with a social system”³ (Tudor xvii). Tudor continues on the

³ Tudor indicates that “Louis Althusser includes sports as one of the Ideological State Apparatuses [whereby] ‘a certain number of realities present themselves in the form of distinct and specialized institutions (Althusser 143)’ that function by ideology to create individuals as self-recognized cultural subjects and since they do not function primarily by force, form the site of ideological struggles, containing contradictions” (Tudor xvii).

ideological and hegemonic dimensions of competitive sports, this time drawing on John Hargreaves' chapter in *Sport, Culture, and Modern Society* who states:

Sport is viewed as a totally ideological phenomenon, controlled by and working in the interests of the dominant class without limit. There is little or no conception of a dialectic between dominant groups, and that sports exists as a one-sided phenomenon, used to disseminate the values of a "ruling class" to the rest of culture. (Hargreaves 105)

In this way, Tudor focuses much of her analysis on the inherent contradictions in the narrative patterns and representational elements of sports and sports films by contrasting sports film heroes from different eras in Hollywood production. Tudor further suggests, "Older films, sports films, from the 1940s and 1950s display on the surface a straight-forward, idealized hero figure. Their heroic surfaces conceal great contradictions in the field of race, gender, and the business of sports" (xii). In chapter two, Tudor provides greater context into these contradictions in American sports films by indicating, "Films from the 1940s and 1950s display a relationship between heroism and the institution of athletics, especially at the professional level. Films dating from the 1960s forward challenge this assumption, creating a hero who fights the system as well as fighting for the system" (46). Consequently, Tudor emphasizes the importance of a more critical reading in order to engage with and explain the numerous contradictions and elisions in most American sport business films.

Certain edited volumes offer further insights into the sociological and ideological dimensions of sports cinema. *All Stars and Movie Stars: Sports in Film and History* (2008) edited by Ron Briley, Michael Schoenecke, and Deborah Carmichael covers a wide range of topics in American sports film in examining sports as a form of cultural production by exploring topics related to gender, race, and national identity in American sports cinema. Among the many

contributions to this text, David J. Leonard's chapter "Do You Believe in Miracles" Whiteness, Hollywood, and a Post-9/11 Sports Imagination" points to the importance of studying white-centered sports films in identifying their role as "disseminators of [American] ideology" (222). Leonard points out that *Miracle* (Gavin O'Connor 2004) serves as a fitting site of analysis "to understand the cultural and ideological climate of post 9/11 America" (222), and the "re-imagined of the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team [in filmic form] plays an important role...that reflects a larger effort to reclaim sports as a space of white dominance and mastery, to revamp the 'golden age' of white athletics" (224). This chapter in particular provides insights into both the ideological importance of sports cinema and the value of re-visiting past events as a way to provide social commentary on contemporary issues in film form. Moreover, Leonard positions American sports films such as *Miracle* as popular culture texts that offers oversimplified, symbolic reaffirmation of white male hegemony in contemporary American culture.

Visual Economies of/in Motion: Sport and Film (Cultural Critique) edited by Richard King and David Leonard (2006) is another collection of essays that address the ideological and sociological dimensions of American sports films. The opening chapter by David J. Leonard and C. Richard King "Screening the Social: An Introduction to Sports Cinema" points out the importance of examining these films with a sense of critical awareness of the contradictions, elisions, and ideologies at work in sports films. The authors indicate, "we are not interested in mapping one dimension of visual culture, and [intend] to offer critical interpretations of sports films and social worlds" (Leonard and King 7). While several chapters specifically cover American sports cinema, such as W.R. Marshall and Julio Rodriguez's "Floating: Surfing and Signification," which comments on the artificial nature of American masculine identity construction in the surfing documentary films *The Endless Summer* (Bruce Brown, 1966) and

Step into Liquid (Dana Brown, 2003), the majority of the selections focus on sports cinema outside the United States in their analyses.

Sports in Films edited by Emma Poulton and Martin Roderick (2008) provides several chapters that address the ideological dimensions of American sports cinema. In the book's introduction, Poulton and Roderick indicate, "While it is interesting to identify the breadth of sports that have been the subject of film, we are more interested in the socio-cultural and politico-economic issues that been constructed and represented within these films" (xx). In support of this, the authors cite David Rowe:

Sport has...extraordinary affective and connotative power, making many people feel deeply moved and also encouraging them to translate sporting values and measures of success and failure to other spheres. Hence, not only are sport and sport metaphors deployed in advertising, but also they can be used readily as the vehicle for the fictional handling of many pivotal issues. (Rowe 193)

As such, the authors claim that sports films are fitting ideological and sociological sites of analysis, and encourage film scholars to examine sports films texts from a wide range of perspectives, indicating "The film text is complex, produced, and 'encoded' by the film-makers (who are a major part of the text themselves), then consumed and 'decoded' by audiences in cinemas and households" (xvii-xix). Drawing on James Monaco's *How to Read a Film* (2000) the authors indicate, "The concept of reading a film involves an active process of making sense of what we are experiencing and trying to understand the relationship between the film-makers, film texts, and audiences" (Poulton and Roderick xix). In addition, citing Stuart Hall in *Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourses* (1973), the authors assert, "Audiences are understood to react to (or 'decode') a film text in one of three ways: they can accept the preferred meaning

encoded by the film-makers; accept parts of the text while rejecting others ('negotiated' reading); or reject the text's preferred meaning ('oppositional' reading)" (Poulton and Roderick xix). Among the selection following the introduction in this collected volume, David Rowe's "Time and timelessness in sport film," Garry Whannel's "Winning and losing respect: narrative of identity in sports films," Kyle Kusz's "Remasculating American white guys in/though new millennium American sports films," and Michael Silk, James Schultz, and Bryan Bracey's "From mice to men: Miracle, mythology, and the 'Magic Kingdom'" all provide insight into the ideological dimensions of American sports films through socio-cultural and politico-economic lenses.

Aaron Baker's *Contesting Identities: Sports in American Films* (2006) provides further analysis into the ideological and sociological dimensions of American sports films. Through his methodological approach, the author indicates he "analyze[s] sports films works within the assumption that culture is a site of ideological conflict between dominant and subordinate groups over the construction of social identities" (Baker 2). The author continues, "In order to maintain hegemonic control, dominant interests attempt to represent subject positions that they favor as serving the interests of all people in the society" (Ibid 2). Baker indicates that sports film operates in this manner through "hegemonic representations [in] their repeated endorsement of the viability and usefulness of self-reliance—and therefore the irrelevance of a social identity based on one's membership to a group"⁴ (Ibid 2). The author openly addresses the inherent contradictions in sports film stating, "Despite the efforts of ideological maintenance, contradictions often show up in the utopian logic of self-determination, allowing us to see the

⁴ Aaron Baker further assert that "movies and other media texts about sports at times digress with endorsements of teamwork and fair play to allay audiences fears about the potential for athletic competition to devolve into Social Darwinism. Yet, ultimately, the individualist mythology has a stronger appeal as utopian narrative, and it certainly best represents the interests of those who own teams, newspapers, networks, movie studios, and other corporations that profit from sports" (11-12).

larger structural determinants of social identities and even possible responses to how these forces can create disadvantage and injustice” (Ibid 2). By focusing on these contradictions, Baker’s approach provides an in-depth ideological analysis of various American sports business films. This is evident in the opening chapter that explores identity construction through sports filmic texts titled “Sports Films, History, and Identity,” and issues surrounding race in chapter 2, “From Second String to Solo Star: Hollywood and the Black Athlete.”

Sean Crosson’s 2013 *Sport and Film* is a pertinent contemporary text regarding the sociological, cultural, and ideological significance of sports in American cinema. Sports and popular Hollywood cinema are important outlets in expressing a wide range of political, social, and cultural sentiments throughout the history of the United States. Drawing on Thomas Schatz’s *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (1981) alluding to the ideological power of American sports films, “in their formulaic narrative process, genre films celebrate the most fundamental ideological precepts—they examine and affirm ‘Americanness’ with all its rampant conflicts, contradictions, and ambiguities” (Schatz 66). According to Crosson, Hollywood sports films skillfully frame the American Dream in mythic terms as an achievable goal for anyone, regardless of race, gender, or social class, as long as the individual is willing to work hard enough to achieve it. Crosson supports this indicating, “What sports films frequently offer is an idealized view of sports, providing an overly simplistic solution to real social problems. However, this trajectory also includes a commitment to the social structures that have ultimately perpetuated social inequalities (8). In addition, “The American film in particular, the utopian sensibility is closely allied to a central ideology in American life, the American Dream. This dream is particularly attractive to the marginalized and underprivileged and is often powerfully affirmed by sports in film” (Crosson 67). The author further suggests that both

“[sports and popular film] share many aesthetic and structural parallels...including the ability to both evoke intense emotional responses and to possess dramatic possibilities...through the manipulation of its various fundamental elements including image, sound, and editing” (Crosson 2). In this way, sports and popular film have the potential for the widespread transmission and propagation of powerful messages that often resonate with audiences on both intellectual and emotional levels while simultaneously eliding or completely avoiding many of the inherent contradictions embedded in the narratives of these sports film texts.

Neoliberalism and Global Cinema: Capital, Culture, and Marxist Critique (2011) edited by Jyostna Kapur and Keith B. Wagner operates as foundational scholarship in examining the ways in which the principles, practices, and philosophies of neoliberalism are represented and explored through global cinema. In the opening chapter, the authors explore how a Marxist critique towards cinema regarding neoliberalism as the hegemonic world order “becomes a lens into the political economy of neoliberalism and its far-reaching implications on culture” (Kapur and Wagner 1). The authors elaborate on important themes explored in film texts regarding the global proliferation of neoliberalism such as “The global nature of the current economic crisis [as of 2009]; the radical restructuring of relations between labor and capital in favor of the latter; the dismantling of social welfare; the conversion of one nation-state after another to advancing free the free market; and a rampant culture commodification, abstraction, and dehumanization” (Kapur and Wagner 2). While the vast majority of this text is devoted to representations of neoliberalism in cinema outside the United States, part one of the text is devoted to Hollywood and the U.S. film industry indicating the widespread influence of American cinema in terms of neoliberalism. The author positions the American neoliberal mass media dimension by asserting:

The U.S. film industry has indeed led the way in neoliberal restructuring of the film/media cultural industries. An integral part of the web of consumer-capitalist culture, the U.S. film industry is not only part of the corporate-financial structure at the top (i.e., GE, Coca-Cola, Ford, Apple, etc.), but it also is at the base of a culture of commodity, such that audiences are produced as commodities and buyers of commodities, thus sutured into an entire network of commodity relations. (Kapur and Wagner, 7)

Within part one, Deborah Tudor's chapter titled "Twenty-first Century Neoliberal Man" provides insightful analysis regarding the re-imagination of American film heroes in terms of what she calls "Neoliberal masculinity, which is premised on compromises between feminism, particularly the white bourgeois kind, and capitalism" (Tudor 59). Tudor continues that many 21st century American film texts "offer a return to stability based on a largely white patriarchy that normalizes a white neoliberal masculinity...and provide examples of a restoration of white masculine power" (60). However, even though this text provides a great deal of analysis regarding the effects of neoliberalism on cinema in general, none of the selections deal specifically with sports films and the ways in which they have been affected by neoliberalism.

Sports and Neoliberalism: Politics, Consumption, and Culture (2012) edited by David L. Andrews and Michael L. Silk explores some of the effects of neoliberalism on contemporary worldwide competitive sports, both at the professional and collegiate levels. In the opening chapter titled "Sport and the Neoliberal Conjuncture: Complicating the Consensus," the authors write, "We are attempting to fill the void [in scholarship] between the heterogeneous complexities of neoliberal ideology, political praxis, pedagogy, and sport" (Silk and Andrews 2). They do so in order to provide insight into "how sport, as a component of popular culture, acts as a powerful educational force that, through pedagogical relations and practices, organizes identity,

citizenship, and agency within the neoliberal present” (Ibid 1). Silk and Andrews further contend that American sports operates as an important site of critical analysis because, “Neoliberalism has its ideological and figurative core in the United States” (Ibid 1). While this text explores a wide range of concepts regarding the confluence between sports and neoliberalism in contemporary capitalist society, it eschews mention of the ways in which sports are portrayed in mass media texts, especially American cinema, through the ideological lens of neoliberalism, and how the complexities and contradictions of neoliberalism are often presented in an oversimplified manner in many of these mass media texts.

The analysis provided in this study regarding post-classical Hollywood sports business films will first help illustrate the development of this contemporary production trend in popular sports cinema in response to various themes and narrative elements of neoliberalism and free market capitalism as generative mechanisms. In addition, this study’s examination of post-classical Hollywood sports business films will help bridge the gap between as a point of convergence between the existing scholarship regarding neoliberalism’s effects on both popular cinema and the world of professional sports. Moreover, it is the intention of this study to position post-classical Hollywood sports business films and a new sites of analysis regarding the effects of neoliberalism on popular culture in the United States and worldwide.

Methodology

The overall methodology of this study centers on a discursive analysis of the narrative and thematic patterns of the aforementioned sports business films through a socio-historic perspective. As previously indicated, the methodology takes into consideration some of the economic and social generative mechanisms that possibly led to the appearance of common narrative patterns and specific thematic elements in these American sports business films. In

doing so, this study employs an interdisciplinary approach in order to draw on multiple concepts from sociology, economics, and ideology in conjunction with aspects of film and media studies. In addition, this study follows Allen and Gomery's historical approach in order to show that socio-historic events can operate as generative mechanisms in affecting filmic narrative patterns by examining "their complexity rather than to isolate a single cause for any given [filmic representation]" (10). Following this approach, this study intends to demonstrate and elaborate on some of the hidden, internal generative mechanisms that might be overlooked through a superficial reading of the representations and thematic elements of contemporary American sports business films.

Discursive analysis regarding these generative mechanisms works well for this study, as indicated by Stuart Hall, "The discursive approach points us towards greater historical specificity...[regarding] the way representational practices operate in concrete historical conditions and in actual practice" (6). Hall continues, "The discursive approach not only examines how language and representations produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connections with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced, and studied" (6). In this way, Stuart Hall's perspectives regarding discursive analysis help in scrutinizing the sociological, cultural, and political implications of the narrative patterns and representations generated and spread by mainstream Hollywood through the production of contemporary American sports business films. Moreover, this discursive approach contributes to the description of certain economic and social generative mechanisms that could have led to the appearance of some of the common themes and trends in the American sports business film relating to the main hypothesis of this study.

In conducting discursive analysis of selected American sports business films, this study employs two strategies of data collection as suggested by G. W. Ryan and Russell Bernard: 1) the social science query method and 2) the search for missing information (85-86). According to Jean-Anne Sullivan and Kathryn Feltey, “in the first [the social science inquiry], the text is examined for topics...such as social conflict, cultural contradictions, methods of social control, and setting and context; in the second [search for missing information], attention is on what is not overtly represented in the text, such as race, class, culture, ethnicity, sex, and gender” (13). Both of these methods are useful in the analysis of the American sports business films, which allow for an in-depth discursive examination of their content in terms of each film’s explicit and implied content along with various elided representations and omissions from the texts and certain embedded contradictions in their narratives structures, filmic representations, and ideological messages.

In analyzing American sports business films as an emerging sub-genre, this study focuses on the concept that Hollywood genres are dynamic, fluid systems, both in terms of their production and reception. Schatz supports this by asserting that genres are continually evolving “as a result in changes in cultural attitudes, new influential films, the economics of the industry, etc., [which] continually redefine any film genre” (16). Steve Neale in his 1990 *Screen* article titled “Questions of Genre” claims “a genre text always either re-works generic expectations, extends them, or transforms them altogether” (58). This concept of generic fluidity is further evidence by Rick Atman in *Film/Genre* (1999) who devotes a substantial portion of his book to the concept of genre as a process, referring to what he terms the processes of “genrification” and “re-genrification.” He suggests, “The most effective method of redefining a genre is not to do so overtly, but rather to promote a subset of the genre to a representative position” (79). This study

examines specific narrative and representational variations indicative of the emergence of the American sports business film as a discernable cycle in film production leading into the beginnings of a new sub-genre of the American sports film.

Another important application of genre analysis in this study explores how the common narrative structures and representational elements in American sports business films can serve diametrically opposed ideological functions within the same filmic text. Thomas Schatz offers the following in regard to this dichotomy:

Genre's fundamental impulse is to continually renegotiate the tenets of American ideology. And what is so fascinating and confounding about Hollywood genre films is their capacity to "play it both ways," to both criticize and reinforce the values, beliefs, and ideals in our culture within the same narrative content. (35)

This study intends to demonstrate that the narratives of the American sports business films under consideration exhibit this same dualistic nature. On the one hand, given their reliance on narrative glorification of the American Dream ideology, one can view these films as cultural artifacts in providing over simplified narratives regarding the concept of success for the masses in contemporary capitalist societies. Using *Moneyball* (2006) as an example, one of the main themes centers on the main character, Billy Beane, employing an innovative method of player talent selection that allows the Oakland Athletics to compete with big money teams such as the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox. In this way, Billy Beane is positioned as an underdog who finds success in the face of conventional wisdom regarding capitalist practices in the modern sports business world. Conversely, many American sports business films offer subtle critiques of capitalism through certain implied narrative elements. Continuing with *Moneyball* as an example, the film exhibits a conflict between the alleged "outdated" player talent selection

processes in favor of a more mechanical approach that eschews the need for skilled labor in the form of professional talent scouts as a recurrent theme. As such, *Moneyball* offers tacit support for modern capitalism, suggesting that skilled labor in the form of talent scouts is obsolete in the face of this more efficient assembly-line method of player selection.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is organized into five main chapters. Following the introduction in chapter one, which includes the literature review and methodology, chapter two examines the emergence of the American sports business film as a recognizable trend in Hollywood production in order to explore some of the socio-historic generative mechanisms that contributed to the appearance of these types of film starting in the 1970s and continuing into the 1990s. One of the main changes identified in this trend is that the business side of sports becomes a more important narrative element, often operating as the driving force in the execution of the story in these films. Another important theme pointed out in chapter two is that athlete film heroes begin to show less allegiance towards their sports team, in sharp contrast with American sports films produced prior to this trend, and exhibit a greater emphasis on their own identity, depicted in the form of individual athletes looking out for themselves and their own careers, while still being a member of a sports team, as part of the narrative framework. This chapter identifies the Curt Flood Case of 1972 and the subsequent development of free agency in professional American sports as major generative mechanisms in order to explain this observable shift in American sports business film. Chapter two also elaborates on the concepts, practices, and philosophies associated with neoliberalism in relation to the overall hypothesis regarding American sports business films. This is done in order to provide a connection between certain events surrounding the introduction of neoliberalism in the United States during the 1980s and into the 1990s as

generative mechanisms that helped generate the new narrative patterns, character emphases, and other representational elements in the early stages of the American sports business film trend. In this initial stage of development, this study examines a body of American sports films produced in the 1970s, such as *Bang the Drum Slowly* (John D. Hancock, 1973) and *North Dallas Forty* (Ted Kotcheff, 1979), and the 1980s, including *The Natural* (Barry Levinson, 1984) and *Major League* (David S. Ward, 1989), among others as sites of analysis regarding these socio-historic generative mechanism.

Chapter three initiates the examination of the next stage of development in the American sports business film by exploring two crucial narrative elemental developments: 1) the main film protagonists begin to shift from athletes to non-athlete sports business agents and 2) these new sports film heroes go into business for themselves as opposed to operating as part of a larger organization or team. In addition, this chapter explores the introduction of neoliberalism in the United States as an important generative mechanism in the appearance of certain narrative and thematic elements of post-classical Hollywood sports business films. Specifically, this study asserts that the sports business agent film heroes are inspired by the neoliberal concept of *homo economicus*, which is defined as “a partner of exchange as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, his own producer, and source of earnings” (Foucault, 226). While the titular character played by Tom Cruise in *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996) operates as a filmic embodiment of *homo economicus*, which helps qualify the film as a prime case study example regarding this concept, other American sports business films are examined as ancillary sites of analysis regarding the concept of *homo economicus* in neoliberal philosophy.

Chapter four examines American sports business films focusing on labor relations in response to the various professional sports work stoppages and players’ strikes in the United

States in the 1980s and 1990s as influential socio-historic generative mechanisms. This chapter examines a body of American sports business films, concentrating on *The Replacements* (Howard Deutch, 2000) as a primary site of analysis, regarding the possible affects of neoliberal ideas in relation to the ways in which organized labor is represented in these films.

Representations of organized labor in contemporary mass media often portray unions in an unfavorable manner. Chapter four identifies that the narrative focus and specific representational elements in *The Replacements* (Howard Deutch, 2000) and other American sports business films exploring labor relations in professional sports operate as filmic critiques of the NFL Players Association's 1987 strike and the Major League Baseball's 1994 work stoppage. In addition, this chapter examines many of the elements relating to the representations of organized labor in *The Replacements* and other American sports business films, which often present a one-sided view of the issues surrounding work stoppages and strikes. In many of these films, player greed is portrayed as the main cause of the work stoppages, while eliding or completely excluding consideration of the actual issues surrounding their demands such as long-term player health and profit sharing, which are both hotly contested labor/management issues in contemporary American professional sports. Chapter four also explores American sports business film featuring themes relating to the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism in more flexible production methods as neoliberal policies and practices began to take hold in global capitalism. assembly line practices and mechanization, and how these processes often reduce the need for skilled labor in modern capitalist practices. The primary site of analysis regarding the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism *Moneyball* (Bennett Miller, 2011)

Chapter five serves as the conclusion in recounting the common themes and narrative patterns derived from this study's overall analysis of these post-classical Hollywood sports

business films. This chapter also points out the social, economic, and cultural implications of the common trends in American sports business films in order to examine their ideological dimensions in relation to the effects of neoliberalism in relation to a new imagination of the American Dream in modern society. In addition, the conclusion offers suggestions for potential sites of future study that follow this study's overall methodological approach and theoretical perspective regarding the effects of neoliberalism in contemporary capitalist society on other mass media texts that feature the business side of sports as a significant narrative elements and themes.

Chapter 2

Sports Business Films: Genre or Recognizable Pattern

Many different types of popular films feature sports as part of the narrative or as a recurrent thematic element. However, assigning genre status to sports films in general is problematic in terms of applying standard narrative formulas and conventional elements across a wide body of films. According to Emma Poulton and Martin Roderick, “‘Sport films’ as a genre in their own right is a difficult assertion to substantiate, particularly given the lack of formula, convention, or collective meaning which characteristically mark-out genre films” (108). Regarding Classical Hollywood films, Richard B. Jewell adds, “It is difficult to ascribe genre status to the ‘sports film,’ for most were examples of other genres which simply incorporated the sporting contest into their preexisting narrative” (248). Glen Jones asserts, “One all-encompassing definition of [sports films] remains elusive. This is particularly so if trying to elevate the sports film into the same generic understanding one applies to, for example, the Western or gangster film” (120). This is substantiated by the fact that the appellation “sports film” encompasses a wide variety of sport: football, baseball, hockey, etc. As a result of these ambiguities, establishing sports film as a definitive genre with clear parameters and standard conventions remains problematic among film scholars.

While this study is not intended as a genre analysis, it is important to first identify some of the basic elements and conventions ascribed to sports films in general before qualifying the American sports business film as an emerging sub-category. Richard Maltby suggests that sports films are recognized in part through their iconography, recurring visual motifs, and a “shorthand system enabling a knowledgeable viewer to glean a great deal of information about the characters and situations” (117). Likewise, Poulton and Roderick claim that “the term ‘sports

films,' not so much as a 'recognized' genre, but at least as a 'recognizable' category, refers to those films which have a sport, sporting occasion, or an athlete as the central focus, and serves as a common point of reference when describing such films" (109). For the purposes of this study, Poulton and Roderick's definition of sports films as a category rather than genre establishes a foundation in qualifying the American sports business film as a recognizable new sub-category within the general category of Hollywood produced sports films in the post-classical era.

Drawing from the above-mentioned criteria ascribed to sports films by Poulton and Roderick, this study examines the appearance of new themes and character variations in what are termed "sports business films" by identifying certain elements and variations that set these films apart from other types of sports films. This first stage of development in the American sports business film (1970 to the mid 1990s) is the basis of this chapter and identifies three significant thematic elements evident in the sports films produced during this time period that set them apart from sports films produced in the Classical Hollywood era. The first refers to the fact that many American sports business films produced during this period focus primarily on the economics or business elements of professional team sports. This stands in contrast to the vast majority of the sports films produced during the Classical Hollywood era, most of which concentrated primarily on the sport itself.

The second unique development found in American sports business film produced during the post-Classical Hollywood era is that the athlete protagonists showed more concern for their individual careers and less allegiance to professional teams with films such as *North Dallas Forty* (Ted Kotcheff, 1979) et al. The third element is that much of the narrative action in sports business films occurs outside the arena of athletic competition and focuses more on various business elements of professional sports. Sean Crosson supports this shift when he asserts,

“Sports films [from the post-classical Hollywood era] are usually more concerned with life outside the ring or off the pitch than with sporting moments and are focused on a wider trajectory” (61). This wider trajectory in sports business films usually appears through plot points featuring athlete protagonists in direct conflict with ownership and management often pertaining to business matters in professional team sports. While these conflicts often occurred through scenarios exploring athlete contract negotiations, other elements of professional team sports economics—including the effects of teams changing ownership or declaring bankruptcy on professional athletes careers and their livelihoods, as in *Slap Shot* (George Roy Hill, 1977)—are additional common narrative developments that help qualify them as post-classical Hollywood sports business films. Based on these thematic, character and narrative variations, the post-classical sports films focusing on the business side of professional team sports with professional athletes as the main filmic heroes, serve as the first stage in the development of the American sports business film as a recognizable sub-category in the realm of sports film production.

Classical Hollywood Sports Business Films: Exceptions to the Rule

In identifying and commenting on the various representations and character types evident in sports business films from the post-classical era, a brief historical and sociological examination of specific sports films from the Classical Hollywood era will help establish the foundation of this shift into a recognizable trend in recent Hollywood production. The American sports business film has its origins in the classical Hollywood period, (1930-1960)⁵, which drew from a common series of narrative tropes concerning social issues relating to sports in American culture. Certain socio-historic phenomena in American history served as generative mechanisms

⁵ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson in their seminal text *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, set the parameters for this time period from 1930-1960; however, the authors admit that “the year 1960 was chosen for reasons of history and convenience,” and that some critics indicate that “1960 is a premature cutoff date” (Thompson, 10), both of which suggest that the production of Classical style films continued after 1960.

in the appearance of thematic elements and character variations in Hollywood cinema, including sports films. According to William Palmer, “Movies [have the ability] to comment upon the society in which they were made; in other words, films [can] become metaphors for the dominant themes of social history” (vi). Classical sports films explored many political, economic, and social themes, all of which provided social commentary on both the contemporaneous world of sports and American society. Matters related to athlete protagonists overcoming obstacles on the field of play or in their personal lives in pursuit of the American Dream dominated classical Hollywood-era sports-film narratives. The main themes of most classical-era sports films concentrated on the importance of hard work, loyalty, and patriotism, as embodied through actions of the idealized athlete protagonists. For the purposes of this study, sports films produced during the Classical Hollywood era (1930-1960) will be shortened and hereafter referred to as classical sports films.

While many classical sports films were intended as light-hearted entertainment—such as the college-football-themed musical comedies *Rise and Shine* (Allan Dwan, 1941) and *Good News* (Charles Walters, 1947), and the baseball musical films *Take Me Out to the Ballgame* (Busby Berkeley, 1949) and *Damn Yankees* (George Abbott and Stanley Donen, 1958)—sports films focusing on gambling were among the most common that dealt with the business side of sports. The vast majority of these sports gambling films explored the world of professional boxing—*The Champ* (King Vidor, 1932), *Golden Boy* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1939), and *Champion* (Mark Robson, 1949)—along with horseracing—*The County Fair* (Louis King, 1932), *King of the Turf* (Alfred E. Green, 1939), and *Boots Malone* (William Dieterle, 1952). However, films focusing on team sports also delved into the world of gambling, including Joe E. Brown’s comical *Alibi Ike* (Ray Enright, 1935), the college-football-themed *The Big Game*

(George Nicholls, Jr., 1936), the ice hockey murder mystery *The Game That Kills* (D. Ross Lederman, 1937), and a college basketball points shaving fictional film titled *The Basketball Fix* (Felix E. Feist, 1951). Along with sports gambling films, college football corruption-themed films were among the first to call attention to the business side of team sports such as the Marx Brothers comedy *Horse Feathers* (Norman Z. McLeod, 1932), *Saturday's Millions* (Edward Sedgwick, 1933), and *Saturday's Hero* (David Miller, 1951). These films explore the corrupt nature of amateur sports, which was common in the world of college athletics during that era. They exist as precursors to the American sports film starting in the 1970s that drew narrative inspiration from issues related to the increased awareness of the business side of professional team sports in American society.

Another significant category of classic sports films is the series of biopics about sports personalities. Popular films such as *Knut Rockne, All-American* (Lloyd Bacon, 1940), *The Pride of the Yankees* (Sam Wood, 1942), *The Stratton Story* (Sam Wood, 1949), *The Jackie Robinson Story* (Alfred E. Green, 1950), *Jim Thorpe, All-American* (Michael Curtiz, 1951), and *The Winning Team* (Lewis Seiler, 1952) among many others featured the idealized life stories of iconic athletes and their rise to fame. One of the most common narrative themes from these sports biopics was an emphasis on hard work, loyalty, and sacrifice as necessary attributes one must possess in order to succeed in American sports and society.⁶ Most of the sports biopics followed the main athlete protagonist overcoming difficulties on the field of play as the main

⁶ Along with operating as metaphors in addressing the importance of hard work and loyalty to one's team as a pathway for any young man to succeed, regardless of economic background or racial origin, many of these same sports biopics also served as metaphoric calls to patriotism during World War II and in the early stages of the Cold War in the 1950s. This usually occurred through references to self-sacrifice, as embodied in the actions of the featured athlete heroes through dramatic monologues or voice-over narration. *The Jackie Robinson Story* epitomizes this concept when the narrator delivers the following statement accompanied by dramatic orchestral music while the camera tracks a young Jackie Robinson, a worn baseball glove in his back pocket, walking down a suburban city street lined with homes surrounded by white picket fences, "This is the story of a boy and his dream; but more than that, it is the story of an American boy and his dream that is truly American."

narrative emphasis with little attention devoted to the business side of professional team sports. When references to business matters in team sports appeared in these biopics, they usually manifested themselves as ancillary plot points holding secondary importance to the main narrative.

Among the vast majority of classical sports films, two films stand out as proto-sports business film, which devote significant screen time and narrative emphasis to the economics of professional team sports. The first is the baseball film *It Happened in Flatbush* (Ray McCarey, 1942). Along with featuring several scenes devoted to player and manager contracts and actual talk of player salaries, this film also calls attention to the business operations of the Brooklyn Dodgers in terms of ownership and the potential sale of the team. A second American sports film that references the economics of team sports is the professional football film, starring Victor Mature as an aging quarterback, titled *Easy Living* (Jacques Tourneur, 1949). The main narrative of *Easy Living* centers on Victor Mature's character, Pete Wilson, who is often referred to as the "highest paid professional football player," facing the end of his career as a result of a life-threatening heart condition. The film repeatedly calls attention to the fact that, even though he is the best-paid athlete in professional football, he has failed to consider life after football, having squandered the majority of his salary trying to please his "gold-digging" wife. Along with this, discussions of player salaries and bonuses occur throughout *Easy Living*. One scene in particular that focuses on player remuneration occurs when the head coach and owner of the team informs his players that if they make the championship game, "they all could make over \$1,000 each." Through the inclusions of these narrative and thematic elements relating to the business side of professional sports, both films are nascent manifestations of the sports business films that would emerge as a significant trend during the 1970s.

Despite the limited presence of business elements in a few films, most American sports films produced during the Classical Hollywood era followed a traditional hero's quest with an athlete protagonist striving for professional and personal success through athletic competition. Ultimately, with few exceptions, most classical sports film narratives unfolded without devoting much attention or screen time to the economic dimensions of professional team sports.

Sports Business Film Origins (1970s-1990s): Personal Interests v. Corporate Operations

The demise of the entrenched "studio system" in the 1960s, changes in the rating system that allowed filmmakers to explore mature topics, and the influences of the European art cinema movement were among the events that led to the development of the New Hollywood cinema. New Hollywood cinema of the late 1960s and 1970s created a venue for exploring and revising the narrative emphasis of the sports film by focusing on more personal and cutting edge themes. Popular and critically acclaimed films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967), *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967), and *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969) established a vanguard for previously taboo and controversial social issues (violence, adultery, drug use, etc.) in mainstream Hollywood cinema. American sports films produced in the wake of these innovative films from the American New Hollywood Cinema movement of 1967-1969 would delve into controversial themes from the world of professional sports, often relating to specific business matters that past Hollywood sports films avoided. These themes included player mistreatment by management and ownership, lack of long-term financial security for professional athletes at the completion of their careers, and rampant, professional sports team-sanctioned drug abuse to allow injured players to remain active in pursuit of a championship. As these issues in professional team sports became more widely publicized in American popular culture, the film

industry began to take notice and drew upon these economic and social concepts as narrative inspiration and thematic elements in the production of subsequent Hollywood sports films.

The 1970s marked an important turning point in American cinematic production in terms of style, content, and social consciousness. No longer strictly adhering to the traditions of the classical era or methodically following the conventional filmmaking and narrative construction, New American Cinema set out to experiment with filmmaking styles and explore controversial social issues. David A. Cook asserts, “The American film industry changed more between 1969 and 1980 than at any other period in its history,” (1). During this time period, David Cook indicates that a wide range of economic and social factors, including U.S. federal tax incentives (12), the relaxation of the MPAA production code (4), influences and incorporation of European Art Cinema styles (160-161), and the rise of the American Auteur, (68) served as generative mechanism that triggered many of the drastic changes in terms of style and narrative composition in 1970s Hollywood production. According to Lester Friedman:

The 1970s witness[ed] an extensive ideological and social transformation in American culture and history [that was] mirrored in the institutional practices of making and distributing motion pictures, the new aesthetics of American movies, and the broad themes that characterized the cinema of this decade. (2)

Many films produced during the 1970s began to explore themes and create narratives based on some of the social and political concerns of American society at that time in history. These historic events and social sentiments can be viewed as potential generative mechanisms in the appearance of new themes and representations in popular films, and are reflected in the emerging trend of American sports business films during the 1970s.

Among the new themes in many American films of the 1970s and into the 1980s was an overt distrust of corporations and big business. According to William Palmer, “The Hollywood villain of the seventies and eighties was a whole new breed. The New Hollywood conception of the villain had gone corporate” (30-31). Different films from this time period—such as *Executive Action* (David Miller, 1973), *The Parallax View* (Alan J. Pakula, 1974), *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleisher, 1973) *Three Days of the Condor* (Sydney Pollack, 1975), *Network* (Sidney Lumet, 1976), *Capricorn One* (Peter Hyams, 1977), *The China Syndrome* (James Bridges, 1979), and *They Live* (John Carpenter, 1988)—all feature narratives that either directly or metaphorically call into the question the secretive, unscrupulous, and often deadly conduct of the corporate world. Palmer continues, “The corporate villain movies didn’t form a genre (they cross all the established genres), but neither were they a temporary brief fad or trend. Call the corporate villain concept a ‘megatrend.’ As an idea, it has obsessed Hollywood for the past fifteen years and shows no signs of abating” (31). Corporate conspiracy films produced in the 1990s-2000s across a wide range of genres—including *Hudson Hawk* (Michael Lehman, 1991), *The Spanish Prisoner* (David Mamet, 1997), *The Matrix* (The Wachowskis, 1999), *The Insider* (Michael Mann, 1999), *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, 2005), *Michael Clayton* (Tony Gilroy, 2007), and even the superhero film *Iron Man 3* (Shane Black, 2013)—all suggest that the corporate villain “megatrend” continues as a consistent thematic element in the production of new Hollywood films.

Many American sports films produced from the 1970s and into the 1990s followed this narrative trend featuring corporate antagonists, often embodied through characters associated with owner/management, at the center of conflict with athlete protagonists over the negotiation of sports business deals and personal player contracts. Baseball films, set in the past, were among

the first to feature conflicts between athletes and various manifestations of the American corporate antagonist, including *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings* (John Badham, 1976) and *The Natural* (Barry Levinson, 1984); however, professional American football films such as *Semi-Tough* (Michael Ritchie, 1977) and *North Dallas Forty* (Ted Kotcheff, 1979), along with the ice hockey film *Slap Shot* (George Roy Hill, 1977), all feature modern representations of corporate antagonists in the form of team ownership or management as indicative of the overall emerging thematic trend in Hollywood sports business films.

All of the above-mentioned films, both those set in the past and the present, offer unique representations of the corporate antagonist. Often, the direct conflict between athlete protagonists and management and/or ownership antagonists, as they negotiate the financial terms of athlete contracts, appeared as either significant sub-plots or become the main narrative focus of these sports business films. As a result, these films help identify and establish this particular narrative dimension of the corporate antagonist as a common theme of the American sports business film trend as it first appeared in the 1970s and continued with greater sophistication and frequency in Hollywood sports business films in the 1980s-1990s.

***Rollerball* (1975): Sci-Fi Dystopian Corporate Society and the Futility of the Individual**

Hollywood science fiction films in the early stages of the post-classical era (1960s-1970s) explored fears surrounding a wide range of pertinent social, political, and economic issues as metaphors or allegories regarding how these concepts might unfold in an uncertain, volatile future. Dystopian themes, which, according to R. Barton Palmer, “present us with futures that conform to our deepest terrors,” relating to contemporary anxieties seemed to dominate production of 1970s Hollywood science fiction films (172). Christine Cornea adds, “Unlike the first ‘golden age’ films, many of the American science fiction films of the 1970s were usually

anti-establishment (of any kind) and offered up questioning critiques of contemporary life” (93). Nuclear war and the dystopian aftermath, as featured in *Planet of the Apes* (Franklyn Schaffner, 1968), *The Omega Man* (Boris Sagal, 1971) and *Zardox* (John Boorman, 1974), along with other forms of potential man-made Armageddon, i.e., germ warfare in *The Andromeda Strain* (Robert Wise, 1971), and ecological disaster in *Silent Running* (Douglas Trumbull, 1971) and *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1974), were all popular Hollywood science fiction themes explored based on many actual social concerns evident in American society during this time period.

In addition, according to David Cook, “technophobia and themes of machines usurping human control...and running amok,” as in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (Joseph Sargent, 1970), and *Westworld* (Michael Crichton, 1973), all delivered grim projections of a dystopian future where humanity is dominated by various manifestations of “unfeeling machines” (239). Another common theme of 1970s dystopian science-fiction films, often in conjunction with technophobia, involved the fear of a corporate dominated society, featuring various manifestations of corporate antagonists (Cook, 240-241). While films such as *Silent Running* (1971) and *Soylent Green* (1974) exhibited overt representations of corporate wrongdoing, others like *THX-1138* (George Lucas, 1974) delivered more subtle social commentary on “the anxiety about the growing power of corporations in American life” (Cook, 243). In any case, corporate villainy and corruption in 1970s dystopian science-fiction cinema emerged as a prominent theme with more appearances of corporate antagonists as significant characters.

Among the growing trend of science fiction corporate-antagonist films, the hybrid science-fiction/sports film *Rollerball* (Norman Jewison, 1975) exists as a metaphorical representation of the social fears surrounding the increasing power of corporate America in the

1970s. Norman Jewison, the film's director, supports this idea by asserting in an interview during the film's production, "*Rollerball* is a warning that possibly in ten or twenty years a game like this will indeed exist and we will indeed be in the hands of a corporate society" (Senn, 212). Set in a futuristic dystopian society in which all national governments have been eliminated and control is wielded by a worldwide network of authoritarian corporate agencies, the mythical, violent game of rollerball exists as the only sanctioned sport. While the game of rollerball is intended as an outlet for primal human aggression in an otherwise peaceful society, it also operates as high-energy entertainment for the masses and a futuristic manifestation of Bread and Circuses: a spectacular social construct to mollify citizens into docile acquiescence. The majority of the characters in *Rollerball* are portrayed as vapid, mechanical shells of human beings, who essentially operate as replaceable parts of corporate society rather than as individuals with a sense of self-efficacy or social agency. Most citizens are content with their condition, yet the corporate overlords fear that the most highly skilled and most popular rollerballer in the world, Jonathan E (James Caan) from the Houston team, poses a potential threat to their tight hegemonic control over the masses. In response, the corporate hierarchy pressures the unwilling and defiant Jonathan E to retire at the height of his playing ability before his influence spreads.

While the entire corporate hierarchy is at odds with Jonathan E, *Rollerball* embodies the corporate antagonist in the form of the charming and charismatic Mr. Bartholomew (John Houseman), Chairman of the Energy Corporation. Throughout the film, most of the conflicts between Jonathan E and the corporations of the world occur in scenes of escalating tension in direct confrontations with Mr. Bartholomew as he pressures Jonathan to retire. As a film character, Mr. Bartholomew exists as a concentrated personification of the draconian corporate society evident in *Rollerball*, and provides audiences with a point of identification as Jonathan

E's struggles to remain defiant and steadfast in maintaining his individuality in the face of corporate oppression. Through this conflict, *Rollerball* delivers a social commentary and cautionary tale regarding the potential dangers on individual freedom posed by the burgeoning political, economic, and social infiltration of corporate power and influence in the United States and globally during the 1970s. Furthermore, through Jonathan E's character, *Rollerball* delivers a unique and unprecedented imagination of a more individually focused athlete protagonists that would become more common in future Hollywood sports film production through the 1970s-1990s and into the 2000s.

The Curt Flood Case, Free Agency, and the Emergence of a New Sports Film Hero

During the early 1970s, American films in general diverged from the long-standing narrative and thematic conventions of classical Hollywood cinema. Lester D. Friedman states:

American cinema of the [early 1970s] broke many of the conventions associated with classical Hollywood filmmaking and can be exemplified by [many] traits... [such as stories] driven by character rather than plot (*Five Easy Pieces*, 1970), cynical in their worldview (*Carnal Knowledge* 1971), critical of American society (*The Godfather* 1972), and dominated by anti-heroes and social outcasts. (*Klute* 1971) (21)⁷

Primary among these innovations was the appearance of characters focusing on more existential issues involving personal exploration rather than larger social causes related to collection action. Furthermore, unlike their predecessors, these new protagonists challenged the standards of the traditional Hollywood film hero, often enacting willful violation of established social mores and,

⁷ The Auteur Theory, along with influences from European Art Cinema from the 1960s-1970s also had significant effects on altering the aesthetics, themes, narrative styles, and character types in Hollywood films of the 1970s; however, while these are important considerations, this study focuses primarily on certain American social, political, and economic generative mechanisms in the development of the American sports business film as a recognizable trend in contemporary Hollywood production.

in some instances, displaying open hostility towards authority figures in politics and corporate America.

Along with themes relating to distrust of the corporate world and other traditional American institutions, another significant development in American sport films produced during the 1970s, much like the overall trend in Hollywood production, was the appearance of more cynical, distrustful, and individually focused protagonists. Specifically, many American sports films produced during the 1970s-1990s featured an increasing number of athlete protagonists showing greater concern for their own careers rather than winning a championship for their teams. These new sports film protagonists stand in contrast to the vast majority of athlete film heroes from the classical Hollywood era, the latter of which displayed unwavering allegiance to their sports teams, often to the detriment of their own playing careers, financial futures, and personal health. For instance, in *The Pride of the Yankees* (Sam Wood, 1942), Gary Cooper's portrayal of Lou Gehrig stands as a quintessential example of a cinematic athlete protagonist of the classical era who identifies with his team more so than his own career. This concept is repeatedly illustrated throughout the film; however, the final scene when Gehrig delivers his famous "The Luckiest Man in the World" speech serves as the most potent statement attesting to his allegiance to his team. After expressing gratitude to his parents, coaches, and the owner of the team, Gehrig openly attributes his success to being a part of "Murderer's Row," which is a reference to what many sports historians consider the best batting line up in history, the top six hitters in the New York Yankees' line up at that time—Earle Combs, Mark Koenig, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Bob Meusel, and Tony Lazzeri, all of whom are prominently featured in the background as Cooper delivers his speech. The fact that in this scene Gehrig calls attention to his role as a team player when he publically encapsulates his historic seventeen-year career to the

capacity crowd at Yankee Stadium is a powerful indication that sports films heroes from the classical era, along with professional athletes in the real world, are expected to behave in a similar, selfless fashion.

The emergence of individually focused athlete protagonists in 1970s American sports films became more common and grew more sophisticated in subsequent years. This occurred when Hollywood began to take notice of real life American professional athletes gaining unprecedented control over their playing careers and financial futures through free agency, and created new athlete film protagonists based on these developments in American professional sports. One of the most influential socio-economic generative mechanisms at that time in history affecting the emergence of individually focused athlete protagonists in 1970s American sports films was the landmark Supreme Court case, *Flood v. Kuhn*, (1970-1972) and the subsequent rise and proliferation of free agency in American professional team sports. The issue arose in 1969 when Curt Flood, an all-star outfielder for the St. Louis Cardinal, refused to be traded to the Philadelphia Phillies and filed a lawsuit against Major League Baseball to prevent the action. Stephen H. Norwood states, “Flood’s lawsuit was intended to overturn baseball’s reserve system (the reserve clause) made possible by its exemption from antitrust legislation” (434). According to Morgen A. Sullivan, “Baseball’s antitrust exemption can be traced back to the 1922 court case *Federal Baseball Club v. National League of Professional Baseball Clubs*, which established that exhibition sports could not constitute interstate commerce or trade warranting federal antitrust regulation” (1270). Under the reserve clause, owners and management could trade, reassign, sell, or release players at will, and all without any input from the athletes themselves. With the reserve clause firmly in place as standard operating procedure, professional sports teams held exclusive rights to all players signed to contracts with their respective teams. This

gave ownership near complete control over every aspect of most professional athletes' careers for the duration of the contracts. Professional athletes who signed with a team were forbidden to negotiate with another team until their current contracts expired. The only recourse professional athletes had at that time in history was to hold out on their contracts by not playing in the hopes of getting more money in the process. This often proved to be a futile effort for athletes choosing this option, and players who sat out for a season not only lost their salary but also earned the scorn of owners in being identified as agitators causing even greater harm to their careers.

While previous legal challenges to the reserve clause were leveled in the history of professional baseball, such as the 1922 lawsuit of *Federal Baseball Club of Baltimore, Inc. v. National League of Professional Baseball Clubs* (Gould IV, 90) and the 1953 case of *Toolson v. New York Yankees, Inc.* (Sullivan, 1271)—both of which resulted in rulings favoring ownership, the Curt Flood Case had the greatest impact as an effective challenge to the pervasive reserve clause. Even though the Supreme Court ultimately ruled in favor of Major League Baseball, the legal and social repercussions of this case, along with public sentiment in support of Curt Flood, all helped to provide future professional athletes with unprecedented leverage in negotiating their playing contracts with ownership and management. The Curt Flood Case also gave more power to the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA), which allowed the union to “negotiate new clauses in the 1973 collective bargaining agreement that solved some of the problems of the reserve clause, which included the players’ inability to have genuine contract negotiations” (Gould IV, 96), and in a 1976 collective bargaining agreement that “permitted free agency after six years” (Gould IV, 98). The Curt Flood Case would eventually lead to the United States Congress to enact into law what is officially now known as the “Curt Flood Act of 1998,” which specifically states:

It is the purpose of this legislation to state that major league baseball players are covered under the antitrust laws (i.e., that major league baseball players will have the same rights under the antitrust laws as do other professional athletes, e.g., football and basketball players), along with a provision that makes it clear that the passage of this Act does not change the application of the antitrust laws in any other context or with respect to any other person or entity. (15 USC 27a, Sec. 2)

The Curt Flood Case resonated throughout the world of professional sports, not only in terms of legislation and economics, but also from a social perspective that permanently changed the culture of professional athletics in the United States. From a socio-historic standpoint, Stephen H. Norwood asserts, “Major League Baseball players [should] appreciate the enormous debt they owe to Curt Flood, who arguably transformed American sports more than any other athlete, with the exception of Jackie Robinson” (433). Even though Curt Flood’s professional playing career was cut short and he failed to reap the financial benefits numerous future athletes would enjoy, the Curt Flood Case exists as one of the most pivotal and influential cultural events in the world of professional sports.⁸

Sports Hero Contrast: *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950) v. *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1973)

As free agency gained more attention in popular culture in the wake of the Curt Flood Case, usually in the form of real life professional athletes having the ability to negotiate more lucrative contracts, Hollywood recognized this as a potential source of narrative subject matter.

⁸ The Curt Flood Case is also credited with laying the groundwork for the eventual skyrocketing of player salaries that were unimaginable to past generations of professional athletes. As real life American professional athletes enacted more control over their playing contracts in the 1980s-1990s, popular culture began to take notice, especially when players held out for larger sums in the millions or during work stoppages in the NFL and Major League Baseball. When this occurred, a growing number of mass media outlets portrayed these professional athletes in unfavorable terms, often as greedy, money-grubbing, and ungrateful to be able to play a professional sport for a living. Representations of professional athlete greed would lay dormant until a later stage of development in American sports films (late 1990s-2000s), which will be covered in greater detail in the following chapters of this study.

Consequently, an increasing number of Hollywood sports films starting in the 1970s featured various prototypes of athlete protagonists concentrating on the free agency dimension of American professional sports. These new sports film protagonists, who came in the form of individually focused athletes, exist as unprecedented manifestations of a new type of sports film hero. More importantly, these new American sports film athlete protagonists of the 1970s are the antithesis of the athlete protagonists from the Classical Hollywood era. The contrast between the two different eras in Hollywood sports film production is vividly illustrated in comparing the athlete protagonists from two prominent sports films from each era: *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950) and *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1973).

Issues relating to players' contracts and financial compensation appeared occasionally in classical sports films, but were often limited in terms of narrative importance. Whenever player contracts or salary negotiations were mentioned, especially in many of the popular sports biopics of the classical era, it typically involved a minor plot point and occupied minimal screen time. For instance in *The Jackie Robinson Story*, the issue of player contracts comes up twice, and both times the issue is explored briefly and superficially. The first occurs when Jackie asks some of his older teammates on the fictional Negro League team the Black Panthers about the best way to get a contract from the owner. The players mock Robinson for his naiveté, informing him that the only way to get a contract is to get an advance on his weekly paycheck and, depending on how many weeks' salary he received in advance, that is the length of his contract. The second reference occurs later when Branch Rickey offers Jackie Robinson the historic contract to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers. During this scene, the financial details and terms of the contract are conspicuously absent from their immediate dialogue exchange and from later conversations Jackie has with his family about the contract. The only reference to any stipulation attached to

Robinson's business contract is illustrated when Rickey insists that he "wants a ball player with enough guts *not* to fight back," referring to the potential verbal abuse and racial discrimination Robinson will likely take from other clubs just for stepping on the field. Later, when Jackie visits a local priest to help him decide if he should sign the contract, they only discuss the social importance of his decision rather than the financial implications or specific terms of the contract. Once Robinson signs the contract, few references to the economics of professional team sports appear in the film, and only then when referring to increases in ticket sales as a result of Robinson's presence on the diamond. The remainder of *The Jackie Robinson Story* is devoted to Robinson's career with the Brooklyn Dodgers, along with various scenes of him enduring racism both on and off the baseball field, as he helps the Dodgers win the National League pennant while earning Rookie of the Year honors in 1947.

In contrast, *Bang the Drum Slowly* (John D. Hancock, 1973) features an athlete protagonist markedly different from the typical classical sports film sports hero. A major narrative element in *Bang the Drum Slowly* centers on the all-star pitcher for the fictional New York Mammoths, Henry Wiggins (Michael Moriarty), who is concerned with negotiating a more lucrative contract with ownership rather than helping his team win the pennant. Several scenes in this film are devoted to Wiggins meeting directly with the owner and general manager to discuss the specific details of his potentially lucrative contract. This inclusion is significant because most sports films from the classical era completely elide any depictions of players negotiating contracts with management/ownership.⁹ The appearance of this type of self-interested sports film

⁹ At the beginning of the film, Wiggins has not yet signed a contract with the Mammoths because he is holding out for more money. However, after Wiggins learns that his best friend and favorite catcher Bruce Pearson (Robert De Niro) is terminally ill, he ends his hold out, agreeing to take less money on the condition Bruce Pearson stays on the team and gets to play. While he performs this selfless act in order to allow his dying friend to stay on the team, the screen time devoted to Wiggins negotiating the terms of his contract stand in sharp contrast to actions and concerns of the cinematic athlete heroes from the Classical Hollywood era.

protagonist in *Bang the Drum Slowly* is one of the first of many films to feature representations of individual athletes negotiating their contracts in the wake of the Curt Flood Case and subsequent rise in free agency in real world of American professional team sports.

Post-classical American sports business films followed this trend in both criticizing corporate America and featuring athlete protagonists who identify with themselves rather than their sports teams. Post-classical American sports business films also explored the real life draconian economics of professional team sports in the United States, and the inhumane treatment of athletes by ownership in the pursuit of building a winning team at all costs. In addition, Hollywood sports films in the 1970s began to focus on both the physical and psychological tolls a lifetime in sports take on athletes that classical Hollywood sports films ignored. The inclusion of these elements led to a new thematic trend in American sports films that would more closely examine the complex, sordid, and mercurial business practices in contemporary professional team sports in the United States at that time in history.

***Number One* (1969): Prototype of the Post-Classical Hollywood Sports Business Film**

At the leading edge of this new trend in American sports film production stands a lesser-known professional football film, *Number One* (Tom Gries, 1969).¹⁰ Though the film opened to mixed reviews, fared poorly at the box office, and is often overlooked in discussions of all-time best sports films in popular culture,¹¹ *Number One* marked the beginning of the post-classical

¹⁰ *Paper Lion* (Alex March, 1968), the film adaptation from George Plimpton's book recounting his on-the-field experiences with the Detroit Lions, precedes *Number One* as a prominent American sports film; however, *Paper Lion* does not qualify as a sports business film under my definition in that it only refers to the economics of professional football once during a scene early in the film at a pre-season training camp meeting when the head coach explains the many ways players can receive fines.

¹¹ *Number One* fails to appear on a wide range of popular best sports film list including: AFI's top 10 sports films (<http://www.afi.com/10top10/category.aspx?cat=4>); IMDB's top 100 list of most popular sports feature films (<http://www.imdb.com/genre/sport>); *Rolling Stone*'s list of top 30 sports films (<http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/lists/30-best-sports-movies-of-all-time-20150810>); or ESPN's top 20 sports movies of all time (<http://espn.go.com/page2/movies/s/top20/fulllist.html>), just to name a few.

Hollywood sports business film trend by its significant incorporation of the financial lives of professional athletes. The main plot centers on Ron “Cat” Catlin (Charlton Heston), an aging star quarterback for the New Orleans Saints, contemplating life after professional football. *The New York Times* review of the film indicates, “*Number One* is an unflinching study of a hanger-on athlete past his peak and fame, prodded by pride, ego, and fear of the future...unable to wrench himself away to find success elsewhere” (Thompson, 1969). Throughout the film, Catlin is depicted as reluctant to retire, even though he is fully aware that, at the age of 40, his best days are behind him. This concept is explored repeatedly in the film through a series of flashbacks to his time as a star quarterback at Notre Dame and his early glory days in professional football. Catlin’s reticence to accept the end of his playing career is accentuated through several scenes devoted to him engaging in verbal conflicts with the talented rookie quarterback who is eager to replace him in the starting line up for the Saints.

Number One further reinforces Ron Catlin’s struggle to accept the impending end of his professional football-playing career through scenes depicting him meeting with potential employers to discuss his job prospects following retirement. The most significant of these occurs when he meets with a computer company executive who offers him a supervisory position with his company. As they discuss the specifics of his job responsibilities, heard in voice-over, a fast-paced montage of computers with blinking lights and moving parts flashes across the screen, accompanied by the din of the computers as they operate in the stark white room housing the noisy machines. The mise-en-scene and editing of this scenario operates as a metaphor suggesting that Ron is about to become just another small part in the machine of modern day capitalism if he takes this position with the company. The executive later informs Ron that he is unable to offer him the job a year from then, and that Ron needs to make a decision soon because

he has several young prospects, all of whom have more working experience with computers. Later in their conversation, the executive further suggests that a small, highly specialized young workforce armed with computers and automation in the name of efficiency and productivity is quickly eliminating many jobs humans once performed in the past, which is a trend he indicates is just getting started in corporate America. These references suggest that Ron Catlin is both representative of an outmoded workforce, both in his professional football career and as a potential middle-aged worker in contemporary corporate society reflective of the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism¹² in the production process in along with other economic and social effects brought on by the spread of neoliberalism in the latter part of the 20th century.

Moreover, both the dialogue and mise-en-scene of this scene are crucial in drawing attention to the concept of the rising power of corporate America in films from this time period. Even though this scene depicts the corporate world in a primarily neutral fashion rather than as overtly malicious, it suggests that the actions of corporate America through the increased use of computers and automation, threatens to depersonalize the contemporary human work force. By depicting Ron Catlin's unenthusiastic reactions during the interview, this scene is a strong visualization and representation that people in contemporary corporate America operate as parts of a "corporate machine" devoid of compassion rather than individuals, and that this prospect is unappealing to most workers.¹³ This element would become a more common theme in

¹² This concept will be explored in greater detail as an important generative mechanism in the appearance of thematic elements in post-classical Hollywood sports business films through my analysis of *Moneyball* (Bennett Miller, 2011) in chapter three of this study.

¹³ Another scene related to Ron Catlin's post-pro football job opportunities revolves around his joining a former teammate, played by Bruce Dern, who works leasing cars. During this scene, Bruce Dern's character, Richie Fowler, Catlin's favorite receiver from the past, tells him that he is unhappy with his work leasing cars, but does it because he makes a considerable amount of money with little effort. This scene, along with Catlin's computer interview, reinforces the idea that work is unfulfilling and empty in contemporary corporate America.

subsequent post-classical Hollywood sports business films, which occurs through depictions of owners mistreating and taking advantage of their players.

Further references to individual athletes struggling against a corporate antagonist in the film are illustrated in scenes devoted to players and coaches discussing contracts and the ephemeral nature of professional sports in terms of athletes' compensation and longevity.¹⁴ These dimensions of player contracts and the fleeting nature of an athlete's career in American professional sports are most vividly depicted when the head coach confronts Ron Catlin in the locker room to determine if he plans to retire before the season starts. The coach informs Ron that "he owes the team an answer" immediately so they can develop a rookie quarterback in his place if he decides to retire. In response, Ron delivers the following acerbic diatribe, which illustrates the way owners and management treat players as commodities rather than human beings when negotiating their contracts:

I owe you nothing. This is the pros, remember, where contract time is a regular love in, and then you sweet talk the price down because you know we've got to play, and that we only have so many years, and no one has the guts to hold out. Then, when you've got us, out comes the bullwhip, and then pretty soon a hot, young kid comes along and we're out on the street again. No tears, no loss, and nobody owes nobody nothing.

The concept of athletes struggling at the end of their playing careers is reinforced later when Catlin meets with a retired teammate in the stadium parking lot after practice who asks him to borrow money. As they discuss the rigors of trying to survive both financially and psychologically as professional athletes, Catlin's down-and-out former teammate talks about the futility of trying to negotiate for higher pay. His comrade reiterates Ron Catlin's earlier

¹⁴ It is important to note that since *Number One* was produced before the Curt Flood case was resolved, which ultimately led to the opening of free agency in the world of American professional team sports, any representations of players having any power in contract negotiation with ownership are absent in this film.

monologue when he provides his thoughts on the way team management and owners mistreat players during contract negotiations by telling Ron that “When we’re playing, we’re too proud to and too dumb not to fight about money,” and “They got us by the short hairs because they know we only have so many years we can play.”

Both of these scenarios, which position team management and ownership in the role of the corporate antagonist, along with Ron Catlin’s existential crisis contemplating life after professional football as the main narrative focus of the film, help qualify *Number One* as a prototypical American sports business film as defined by this study. *Number One* also devotes significant screen time to the complicated business and psychological dimensions of professional team sports. In the process, this film initiated a precedent for themes relating to the economics of professional team sports that subsequent mainstream American sports films would follow as the trend developed into the 1990s.

Certain American sports films produced after *Number One* unfolds along similar narrative patterns featuring the economics of professional sports teams and athlete protagonists looking out for their own financial futures. In addition, these American sports business films began to feature the appearance of more sophisticated corporate antagonists, as embodied through team management and ownership in conflict with athlete heroes fighting for greater compensation. While some sports business films presented a definitive corporate antagonist in the form of a corrupt team owner or manager, others delivered a more detached filmic antagonist by representing corporate America through professional team sports ownership as indifferent to the physical well being or financial futures of athletes in their employ. In many of these sports films, team ownership is portrayed as confrontational with their players, showing little regard for their welfare, and mainly concerned with turning a profit through the efficient operations of their

respective professional sports teams. Many sports films of the 1970s began to follow this trend by featuring more narrative conflicts between athletes looking out for themselves while pitted against unscrupulous owners taking advantage of their players in pursuit of profits.

Archetype of the Post-Classical Hollywood Sports Business Film: *North Dallas Forty* (1979)

North Dallas Forty (Ted Kotcheff, 1979) exists as a maturation of the sports business film that embodies many of the elements from other proto-sports business films produced during the 1970s. This popular American sports film features both a candid view of the inner workings of professional team sports, and a multifaceted corporate protagonist in the form of team ownership in direct opposition to the individually focused main athlete protagonist. This professional football film, based on the novel of by former Dallas Cowboy tight end Peter Gent, features the North Dallas Bulls (a thinly veiled reference to the real-life Dallas Cowboys) as the top team in professional football because of the mechanical and unsympathetic manner in which they control all aspects of team management and operations through a corporate model. The main plot centers on Phil Elliot, an aging, strong-willed independent wide receiver for the North Dallas Bulls, resisting to blindly accept the hypocritical “team family” mentality espoused by ownership, managements, and the coaching staff, all of which show little regard for their players’ long-term well being. *Variety* magazine’s 1978 review of *North Dallas Forty* asserts, “What distinguishes this screen adaptation of Peter Gent’s bestseller is the exploration of a human dimension almost never seen in sports pix. Most people understand that modern-day athletes are just cogs in a big business wheel” (*Variety* staff, 1978).

Throughout the film, the North Dallas Bulls are presented as an organized business endeavor, at least as envisioned and perpetuated by the owners, management, and coaching staff. While numerous individual corporate antagonists appear in *North Dallas Forty*—including the

oil baron owners, Conrad Hunter (Steve Forrest), and his brother Emmett (Dabney Coleman), and the coaching staff, including the head coach, B.A. Strother (G.D. Spradling) as well as the foul-mouthed, Maylox-swilling assistant coach, Johnson (Charles Durning)—together they represent an oppressive corporate entity exploiting their workforce (players on the football team) in pursuit of winning the Super Bowl at any cost. As a result, team ownership, management, and the coaching staff in *North Dallas Forty* take on a more complex and pervasive dimension as a new narrative representation of the corporate antagonist in unfavorable terms in the emerging trend of post-classical Hollywood sports business films. In support of this, *Variety*'s review further indicates, "It is no surprise that the National Football League refused to cooperate in the making of *North Dallas Forty*. The production is a hard-hitting and perspective look at seamy side of professional football" (*Variety* staff, 1978). Given the NFL's lack of cooperation in the making of *North Dallas Forty*, it appears that the themes explored in this film provided league officials with an unnerving and more realistic representation of the various dimensions of professional sports in the United States they were willing to reveal in popular culture.

The Corporate Nature of Professional Sports as Represented in *North Dallas Forty*

The main athlete protagonist, Phil Elliott (Nick Nolte) is at the center of numerous conflicts between the overbearing owners in unison with the micro-managing coaches against individual players on the team. The first conflict occurs when Phil Elliott is called to meet with the head coach at the team's corporate headquarters. When Phil arrives for the meeting, he moves past groups of business executives all carrying briefcases through a clean, modern business plaza in front of the Conrad Building, which is a towering skyscraper set among several corporate buildings. The brief action depicting Elliott simply walking into the building for his

meeting serves as a visual reinforcement and indication of the growing corporate nature of professional team sports in the United States.

When Elliott reaches the top floor, he notices a large mural on the wall of the main lobby illustrating the far-reaching extent of the Hunter family business holdings. The mural consists of a large, ornate tree with numerous branches supporting icons representing their various businesses (including oil rigs, manufacturing plants, hotels, and jet airliners) with the title “Conrad Hunter Enterprises” prominently displayed at the top. While the mural is patterned after a tree, it also clearly resembles an octopus, especially with eight of the main branches extending out like tentacles holding up the various icons in the mural. The octopus is often used as a representative symbol of corporate culture as Regina Lee Blaszyk indicates, “Big Business in the eyes of some is an evil, great octopus that is supposed to strangle and consume the little fellow, control prices and markets, join with other big businesses in complicated interlocking directorates to exercise great and sinister economic power over the country” (76). When Phil Elliot is shown looking at the image, he is dwarfed by its size, and is visually engulfed by image of the Conrad Hunter Enterprises mural, suggesting that he has become an infinitesimal part of the larger corporate body that owns the North Dallas Bulls. This concept is immediately reinforced when Conrad Hunter himself notices Elliott looking at the picture and puts his arm around him—symbolizing yet another tentacle of the corporate octopus—and proudly declares, “You know, there is not one damn corporation I own that means more to me right here [pointing to his chest while holding a cowboy hat in one hand and a cigar in the other] than my football team.” Conrad Hunter points to the mural, which prominently features the helmet of the North Dallas Bulls football team positioned on the top branch in support of his claim. The image of Hunter reverently staring at the emblem of the North Dallas Bulls in brief silence suggests that,

even though he owns many businesses, all of which are more profitable than his football team, he takes the greatest pride in owning the team. This visual display and mise-en-scene in this particular scene help symbolize the immense power and extensive reach of the corporate nature of professional team sports both in the diegesis of the film and reality. In addition, this scene foreshadows Phil Elliott's eventual fate, acting as a visual metaphor suggesting that Phil is about to be engulfed, consumed, and cast aside by the corporation as they cold-heartedly pursue a Super Bowl championship.

A later scene further illustrating the growing corporate nature of American professional team sports occurs when the owners of the North Dallas Bulls attend a team practice. Conrad Hunter, along with his son and Emmett Hunter, sit on the sidelines surrounded by junior executives, watching the players beat up on each other as they prepare for the upcoming playoff game against Chicago. As the Hunters watch in amusement, a rival executive (Horace) from another large corporation, who is dressed in a western style suit and a large cowboy hat, joins the owners on the sidelines. After they engage in small talk, Horace then speaks to the recent demise of Conrad's father, expressing his condolences, "When a man of your daddy's wealth dies of cancer, you know they haven't found a cure," which is directly followed by all the junior executives nodding in agreement in the background. This seemingly incidental comment can be seen as a subtle commentary on the idea that only the extremely wealthy have access to the best possible medical resources, which is visually reinforced by the owners being in a different physical space than their players during this scene.

After Horace thanks Conrad for his sentiment, they discuss the upcoming game that will put them in championship contention. Conrad proudly states, "Winning a championship is all that matters." Horace then reminds Conrad that his manufacturing division makes more in one

week than the football team does all year, even if they do win.¹⁵ Conrad responds, “You’re right, but my manufacturing division never got me the cover of *Time* magazine.” Emmett interjects with a tongue-in-cheek comment, “The money ain’t everything. You know that, Horace. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.” The Hunters and Horace laugh at Emmett’s statement, suggesting that they catch its irony; then Conrad gleefully utters after watching his players engage in a violent fight on the field, “They’re going to cream them in Chicago. We’re going all the way this year.” This scene serves again as a metaphor for the overall power structure in society in terms of concentrated wealth among the privileged few, which is again bolstered by the physical separation between the owners on the sidelines watching the players perform the dirty work to elevate the owners to a position of glory in the business world.

The Contemporary Professional Team Sports Athlete as a Cog in the Corporate Sports Machine

Further illustrations of the pervasive corporate culture that exists within the North Dallas Bulls football organization and the machine-like treatment of its players appears through multiple references to computers and the role they play in helping the team remain successful on the field. The coaching staff frequently calls attention to the mechanical process by which they run the team with the aid of the computer when they remind the players about the importance of going over the computer printouts in studying the tendencies of their opponents. This concept is presented early in the film when Elliott meets with the head coach at the corporate headquarters to discuss his future with the team. At the beginning of the meeting, the coach sits behind the desk reading the data in front of him on the computer without looking at Elliott. This scene

¹⁵ If *North Dallas Forty* were made in the 2000s, this statement would have less narrative power and likely be inaccurate since professional sports in the United States is one of the most profitable businesses due to network television deals, merchandising, and tremendous tax subsidies in their long-standing non-profit status. The National Football League alone is reported to have made \$10.6 billion in revenues, clearing \$1 billion in profits in 2014 (<http://money.cnn.com/2015/01/30/news/companies/nfl-taxpayers/>).

unfolds for nearly 30 seconds of screen time, with no dialogue, and is punctuated by the sound of the computer processing data as the scene's lone audio. This action suggests that the head coach is more concerned with what the computer indicates about Phil as a football player rather than with directly interacting with him as a human being. Once the coach actually speaks to Elliott, he tells him directly, "A winning team is 45 finely meshed gears working together in perfect synchronization. If one of those gears flies off, I'll pull it." This line of dialogue clearly indicates that the coach views his players as redundant components that are easily replaced if found defective in achieving their ultimate goal. This concept is illustrated later during an important team meeting before the playoff game against Chicago. During the meeting, the head coach admonishes his players, "The key to being a professional is consistency. And that computer measures that quality. No one of you are as good as that computer."¹⁶ References to computers and the role they play in allowing the team to succeed is a common theme revisited throughout the film, especially when the coaches interact with the players. These repetitive thematic elements emphasizing to the importance of computer technology (through the use of standard corporate operational practices) in building a winning football teams helps expose the impersonal nature of professional team sports in the United States. This mechanical nature of sports team management along with their impersonal treatment of players first evidenced in *North Dallas Forty* would become more common thematic elements in the post-classical Hollywood sports business film trend.

Another important visual design element of the film's mise-en-scene highlighting the mechanical nature of the team occurs when the players are shown exercising in unison in the

¹⁶ This is a perfect illustration calling attention to the sharp contrast in the relationships between the coaches and players in classical Hollywood sports films, which is epitomized in performances such as the "Win One For the Gipper" speech brought to life by Patrick O'Brien's portrayal of the famed Notre Dame coach in *Knute Rockne, All American* (Lloyd Bacon, 1940).

high-tech weight room. This entire weightlifting scene is presented as a fast-paced montage, depicting a series of players working out on modern weightlifting machines with the sound of the piston-driven weight mechanisms grinding across the metal supports combined with upbeat contemporary music. This visual montage sequence illustrates the physical prowess of the North Dallas Bulls as a formidable team in professional football, but also draws attention to the mechanical nature of the sport and the players as parts of a systematic mechanism as a metaphor consistent with similar themes and visual depictions throughout the rest of the film.

The ease with which players are replaced is illustrated most dramatically during a team film session after the previous week's win against Seattle. When an offensive lineman by the name of Stallings (James Boeke, a former Los Angeles Ram standout) is shown being easily beaten by his defensive counterpart, which allows the quarterback to be sacked, the head coach asks him what he was thinking during that play. Stallings indicates in a tremulous manner, "I'm not sure, sir." The head coach responds, "The entire game riding on this set of downs and we have a player who is not sure. We have no room in this business for uncertainty. No room." After the meeting, Stallings is summarily cut from the team, as suggested by the equipment managers removing Stallings' name from his locker. Players witnessing this removal show no compassion for their former teammate and show further disregard by flippantly asking the equipment manager if they can have what is left of Stallings' equipment. When Phil Elliott asks the all-star quarterback, Seth Maxwell (Mack Davis), a character based on the famous Dallas Cowboys quarterback Don Meredith, "Can you believe they cut Stallings?" Seth responds indifferently and nonchalantly, "Who is Stallings?"

All these performances and depictions clearly indicate that the players exist as easily replaceable parts in the overall corporate machine of the North Dallas Bulls. The players

themselves are numb to this reality and accept it without much difficulty, unless their own jobs are at stake. Moreover, the fact that Phil Elliott is the only player to show concern over Stallings being cut for making a single mistake further illustrates how the vast majority of people involved in professional sports, both players and coaches, accept the cold-hearted and brutal nature of their profession under the control of the filmic corporate entity Conrad Hunter Enterprises.

Along with the presence of the corporate antagonist in *North Dallas Forty*, the character of Phil Elliott represents an evolution in the individual athlete protagonist as another crucial aspect of the new trend in 1970s American sports business films. One of the most distinguishing characteristics of Phil Elliott as an post-classical Hollywood sports business film protagonist is that he shows little concern for the overall success of his team, and simply wants to play as much as possible regardless of how it affects his team's ability to win championships. In sharp contrast to sports heroes from the Classical Hollywood era, Phil Elliott is openly brazen about his individual focus as an athlete in getting as much playing time as possible, even if it means that his team suffers in the process. Elliott's selfish attitude is explored during the meeting with the head coach at corporate headquarters early in the film. The coach informs Elliott that he needs to get accustomed to sitting on the bench if it gives the team a better chance of winning. The coach follows up by saying, "I know players who have actually gotten used to sitting on the bench, if that is possible." Elliott immediately responds, "It's not." The coach admonishes him, referencing the information provided by the computer, "There's a theme that runs through all this data, Phil. It's your immaturity. You lack seriousness." Again, Elliott displays his defiant attitude and individual focus as an athlete, "Well, I scored 5 TDs coming off the bench, now that's pretty serious." Frustrated, the coach retorts, "You scored 5 TDs? Don't you know that we worked for those, we planned for them. We *let* you score those touchdowns!" In defense, Elliott says, "B.A.,

I've always given you 100%." The coach responds, "You're talking about individual effort. But I'm talking about team effort." Elliott reluctantly accepts the fact that he will have to sit on the bench, even though he is one of the best wide receivers in the game and has been a starter for the past six years.

The conflict with the head coach during this scene is a clear indication that Phil Elliott is resistant to the overall concept of team play, at least when it interferes with his personal playing time. Elliott's reluctance to sit on the bench is further illustrated when he admits to one of his sexual partners, who happens to be engaged to Emmett Hunter, his frustrations due to his lack of playing time. He tells her after their sexual encounter, "B.A. wants me to adjust to sitting on the bench. Hell, I'll die on the bench. What's the sense of the team winning if I don't survive?" He then tells her that he roots for the other team to do well when he is on the bench so they will get behind and the North Dallas Bulls will have to put him in the game. The concept of Phil Elliott's nearly single-minded individual focus as an athlete is established early in the film positions him as a prime example of the new type of athlete main characters evident in the emerging trend of American sports business films. Classical Hollywood sports film protagonists rarely displayed such selfishness, and athletes unwilling to operate as team players were positioned in unfavorable terms. While Phil Elliot is presented as an imperfect character, he serves as the film's clear point of identification for audiences based specifically on his defiant traits. In this way, Phil Elliot is a quintessential example of the new type of athlete protagonist evident in the post-classical Hollywood sports business film trend.

Playing Time, Drug Use, and Athlete Manipulation in Pursuit of a Championship

Elliott's intense desire to play at all costs is later exploited by the coaching staff in order to manipulate a younger player with an injury to take painkillers in order to play in their crucial

game against Chicago. This scene illustrates another common theme in *North Dallas Forty*: the prominent display of drug use by professional athletes. The vast majority of the athletes in *North Dallas Forty* are depicted taking painkillers, smoking marijuana, and abusing alcohol as part of their daily routines. Elliott, an aging athlete who has suffered multiple injuries throughout his career, has become dependent on using as many drugs as possible just to keep walking, let alone play. Along with Elliott's singular focus to play at all costs, the coaches are fully aware of Elliott's willingness to take potentially dangerous drugs to play. When one of the starting wide receivers, Delma Huddle (Tommy Reamon), pulls his hamstring and refuses to take any type of drugs, the coaches devise a plan to use Elliott in manipulating the younger player to take a numbing injection to allow him to play through the injury. On the day during practice when Delma injures his hamstring, the head coach informs Elliott that, because Delma refuses to take painkillers, Elliott will start in his place in the crucial game. Elliott, elated, declares to the coach that he is willing to do whatever it takes to play, and tells the coach, "Hell, I love needles," which is precisely what the coach expected. On the day of the game, the coaches make certain that Delma is present when Elliott endures an incredibly painful pre-game injection of the numbing agent in full view of the locker room. The assistant coach informs Delma that they really need him for the game, and that Elliott is willing to do what it takes to help out the team, even if it means endangering his own health. When Delma resists, the coach admonishes him, "You can't make it in this league if you don't know the difference between pain and injury." After a bit more coaxing, Delma finally acquiesces to the team's wishes and takes the shot, which allows him to re-enter the starting line up, putting Elliott back on the bench.

This particular subplot surrounding the coaches using Elliott to help them manipulate another player to do their bidding in *North Dallas Forty* is crucial in epitomizing a common

theme in post-classical Hollywood sports business films; it also serves as a clear illustration of the willful disregard corporate team ownership and management have for the health of their players in pursuit of a championship. Moreover, this concept as depicted in the film can be viewed as emblematic of the way corporate entities operate in contemporary society regarding their own workforces outside the world of professional sports.

North Dallas Forty, along with many other American sports business films produced during the post-classical era, explores the themes of the corporate antagonist and display individual athlete protagonists who are more concerned with their own careers than helping their professional sports team win a championship. These themes and narrative tropes carry over into the next stage of development in the American sports business film as it incorporates new themes and representations that are the result of emerging social, political, and economic generative mechanisms during the new millennium. The most influential generative mechanism impacting from this time period the American sports business film was the spread of neoliberalism as an economic policy and its effects on popular culture in the United States during the latter part of the twentieth century. The next chapter explores in detail the functional role neoliberalism played and continues to play in affecting certain developments in contemporary American sports business films.

Chapter 3

Effects of Neoliberal Philosophies on Post-Classical American Sports Business Films

One of the most significant generative mechanisms affecting the development of the post-classical Hollywood sports business film trend can be traced to the influences of neoliberalism in the United States starting in the 1980s and continuing into the 21st century. Neoliberalism's etymology has a variegated history and often elicits conflicting connotations depending on its usage and context. While primarily known as a late 20th century political strategy and series of economic policies encouraging free market capitalism and globalization of national economies, neoliberalism is also a powerful ideological and cultural force that affects many aspects of American society beyond economics.

As such, providing a singular, all-encompassing definition for neoliberalism is a difficult task, and requires a nuanced examination of its many theoretical components and practical applications. In addition, neoliberalism has different meanings when applied to the economic practices and cultural production in different parts of the world at different times in recent history. Moreover, since neoliberalism consists of so many facets and dimension in terms of economics, politics, and culture, much disagreement exists among scholars in its codification and how the various dimensions of neoliberalism are represented in mass media and popular culture. According to Jamie Peck "Neoliberalism is a loose and shifting signifier; it is a scholarly commonplace that neoliberalism has no fixed or settled coordinates, that there is a temporal and geographical variety in its discursive formations, policy entailments, and material practices" (135-147). Jake Coakley add that neoliberalism can be viewed as a complex ideology that is "manifested in four ways: 1) As an economic doctrine; 2) As a political project; 3) As a cultural perspective; and 4) As a guide for the organization of social relationships" (69). The ideas of

neoliberalism as a “cultural perspective” and a “guide for...social relationships” are important dimensions of neoliberalism outside the political and economic world that operate as powerful generative mechanisms in affecting the development of post-classical Hollywood sports business films as a distinctive trend.

Speaking to the influences of neoliberalism outside the world of economics and politics, Wendy Brown asserts, “Neoliberalism is most commonly understood as enacting an ensemble of economic policies in accord with its root principle of affirming free markets...[which] include the financialization of everything...in the dynamics of the economy and everyday life” (Brown, 28). Michel Foucault further qualifies neoliberalism, especially in the United States, as “a form of reason that involves generalizing [the economic form of the market] through the social body and including the whole social system not usually conducted through or sanctioned by monetary exchanges” (269-269). Wendy Brown supports this idea, “Thus, market principles frame every sphere of activity, from mothering to mating, from learning to criminality, from planning one’s family to planning one’s death” (67). In this way, neoliberalism helps shape the production of subjects/citizens in modern capitalist society, based on Foucault’s assertion that this market-based “mode of reason” guides all aspects of conduct, both in the world of business and non-economic spheres of existence. Foucault’s “mode of reason” appears in post-classical Hollywood sports business films in the form of unique characters along with new representations and narrative elements guided by the free market model of social and personal conduct in fin de siècle neoliberal philosophy.

While taking into consideration the economic and political dimensions of neoliberalism, this study focuses on the cultural and sociological dimensions of neoliberalism on affecting the creation of unprecedented representations and elements in post-classical Hollywood sports

business films. It is important, however, to first provide a brief history of the economic and political aspects of neoliberalism in from the 1970s to the 1990s, especially as it occurred in the United States. In doing so, exploring the background and development of neoliberalism and examining its real world effects on the U.S. economy during this time period will help qualify the pervasive effects of neoliberalism on non-economic matters such as popular culture. Specifically, in this case, analyzing neoliberalism as a generative mechanism in affecting new themes, narrative emphases, character types, and other forms of representation in post-classical Hollywood sports business films.

Neoliberalism: A Brief History of its Political and Economic Developments in the U.S.

Neoliberalism, as an economic philosophy, has its theoretical origins that stemmed from free market think tank luminaries including Friedrich Hayek from the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS) and Milton Friedman from the Chicago School of Economics, among others. As the cornerstone of neoliberal philosophy, these figures emphasized “the moral benefits of free markets as a necessary condition for free and democratic societies” (Birch and Tickell 43). During the years after World War II, many of these burgeoning neoliberal scholars voiced strong criticisms of Keynesian economics, the guiding macroeconomic philosophy that helped ameliorate many of the devastating effects of the Great Depression in the United States. Some of the key achievements under Keynesian policy, which favored progressive taxation on wealthy individuals and profitable corporations, were the creation of numerous public institutions along with unprecedented publically funded social services in the United States such as Social Security and Medicare. In addition, according to some scholars, Keynesian policies helped create an economic environment offering a pathway for members of the working class entry into the middle class, and ultimately contributed to what some scholars call the “Golden Age of

Controlled Capitalism” in the United States from 1945-1975 (Steger and Roy 7).

As an emerging counter political project, it was the main objective of neoliberal advocates to provide an alternative narrative to Keynesian policy asserting that, “The state’s role in the economy should be to support free markets through the ‘rule of law’ rather than owning and running businesses and welfare service” (Birch and Mykhnenko 5-6). Stephanie Lee Mudge adds neoliberal philosophy strives to alter “the bureaucratic face of state policy to be expressed as liberalization, deregulations, privatization, ...and aims to ‘desacralize’ institutions that had formerly been protected from the forces of private market competition, such as education and health care” (704). During the Keynesian period, neoliberalism remained a fringe economic theory in academia, and “on the margins of both policy and academic influence until the troubled years of the 1970s” (Harvey 22). Neoliberalism would lay dormant, at least in developed nations of the Global North¹⁷, until economic conditions worsened in the United States and key Western European nations in the late 1970s that led to the eventual decline of Keynesian policies and practices as the main economic philosophy in the United States and worldwide.

Through various economic crises in the United States and worldwide in the mid to late 1970s, neoliberalism gained traction as a viable alternative to Keynesianism to provide both economic and political solutions for many of the struggling national economies in the West. Daniel T. Roger states that “From the sudden worldwide ratcheting up of global oil prices during

¹⁷ Neoliberalism has a much different origin in regions of the Global South. Instead of the gradual and relatively peaceful introduction of neoliberal policies as it occurred in the United States and Great Britain, many nations of the Global South had stipulations attached to developmental loans from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organizations that explicitly required the implementation of neoliberal economic practices, including privatization of all public services (Brown 51). When countries opposed these practices, nations from the Global North intervened to quell such uprisings. According to Bob Jessop, in 1970 when Chile elected the socialist Salvador Allende as a strong referendum on neoliberalism, the United States, under the pretenses of stopping the spread of communism in South America, helped back a military coup d’etat led by General Augusto Pinochet that resulted in the murder of Allende. Once Pinochet took power, Chile remained a stronghold of neoliberalism into the 21st century, and is often referred to as one of the most successful neoliberal “experiments,” also known as the “Miracle of Chile” by Milton Friedman (Birch and Mykhnenko 172-173).

the Arab-Israeli War of 1973 through the energy crisis of Carter's last years in office, the [late 1970s] was a period of extraordinary turmoil in the economic markets" (43). As the 1970s progressed, public confidence in the American economy eroded to its lowest levels in recent history. This was epitomized by the widely publicized "Crisis of Confidence" of the latter years of the Carter Administration, marked by his "Malaise Speech" on July 15, 1979, which had become "the legendary symbol of despair in the 1970s in American society" (Schulman 140-141). Daniel T. Roger adds, "By the end of the 1970s the U.S. economy had experienced inflation rates unequalled since the early 1940s...and the so-called 'misery index' (produced by adding the rates of inflation with unemployment)—which was 7 percent during the Kennedy-Johnson years—averaged 16 percent during Carter's presidency" (42-43). Culminating in the late 1970s through the economic, political, and social unrest brought on by this uncertainty both in the United States and worldwide, desperate nations began to seriously consider neoliberalism as a viable alternative to Keynesian macroeconomics. As a result, many of the concepts of neoliberalism were implemented and eventually became official policy.

With the election of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States in 1980 and Margaret Thatcher's rise to power as Prime Minister in Great Britain in 1979, neoliberalism gained two popular and highly influential proponents with enough political clout to introduce neoliberalism as a mode of operation in both governmental policies and wide spread free market economics at an accelerate pace. As political leaders of two of the most powerful capitalist societies during the 1980s-1990s who stayed in power for nearly a decade respectively, both Thatcher and Reagan implemented numerous legal and administrative actions that led to the eventual dissolution of many taxation practices and social institutions that arose from Keynesian economics. Jay Coakley adds "Neoliberalism as a political project during the Reagan and

Thatcher administrations, took aggressive steps in gradually removing public funding for a wide range of social services, which led to the privatizing of public sector programs and industries so that the public sphere [would be] subsumed by the market” (71). In addition, numerous deregulation efforts initiated by Reagan and Thatcher led to the gradual elimination of long-standing legal restraints on investments and capital flows that allowed for greater “financial liberalization” and “free-floating exchange rates” all based on supply and demand unfettered by governmental intervention (Birch and Mykhnenko 7). While taking root slowly, neoliberal policies such as the privatization of public services along with economic policies supporting free market capitalism all remain entrenched as standard operating procedure in 21st century United States economic and political practices.

Deindustrialization of America in the 1970s as Represented in Sports Business Films

One of the first effect neoliberalism had on variations in some of the thematic and narrative elements in post-classical era American sports business films as a generative mechanism was related to the deindustrialization of the American economy in the late 1970s-1980s. Deindustrialization, brought on by fin de siècle 20th century globalization and neoliberal policies, refers to the decline in the manufacturing sector and manufacturing jobs in the United States and other “developed” countries such as Canada, Great Britain, and France starting in the 1970s and continuing into the new millennium. According to Steven Saeger, deindustrialization in the United States and other “developed” countries accelerated in the 1970s when corporations began closing their manufacturing plants and relocating them to facilities in newly industrialized regions of the world such as China, South Korea, and many Latin American countries all with fewer safety regulations, environmental restrictions, and larger cheap, non-union workforces (580). In *Poverty in the United States: An Encyclopedia of History, Politics, and Policy, Volume*

I, Carl Nightingale characterizes deindustrialization in the United States as “the movement of goods and investments from central cities to the suburbs and from the Rust Belt to the Sun Belt of the South and Southwest” (Mink and O’Conner 345). In many of these southern cities in right-to-work states, unions had a much weaker presence and bargaining power and thus helped establish wages and benefits at much lower levels than in Rust Belt States, also offered generous tax incentives along with the relaxation of various environmental and work safety restrictions.

Ha-Joon Chang asserts:

As jobs were ruthlessly cut, many workers were fired and re-hired as non-unionized labor with lower wages and fewer benefits, and wage increased were suppressed (often by relocating or outsourcing from low-wage countries such as China and India—or the threat to do so). (23)

Even though some areas of the United States experienced increases in manufacturing jobs, especially in Sun Belt States,¹⁸ Rust Belt cities whose economies were highly focused on heavy industry suffered the most in terms of high paying job losses as the economies shifted from manufacturing to the service industry, which consisted mostly of low-paying, non-union jobs. During the late 1970s, many Rust Belt cities and states experienced significant reductions in high-paying manufacturing jobs, which had wide spread economic and social effects on the region. For instance as quoted in *Poverty in the United States: An Encyclopedia of History, Politics, and Policy, Volume I*:

In 1947, 340,000 people worked in Detroit’s factories, heavily concentrated in auto making. Thirty years later, the number had dropped by almost two-thirds to 138,000.

¹⁸ Carl Nightingale further suggests, while American deindustrialization was very uneven, and in some places in the United States manufacturing actually expanded, when companies closed their manufacturing plants in the unionized Rust Belt states (Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, etc.) and moved them to non-union Sun Belt states (Florida, Texas, Arizona, etc.), manufacturing workers in the Sun Belt states earned lower wages than their Rust Belt counterparts (345).

Buffalo, another bastion of heavy industry, lost 41,000 jobs, a third of the city's total, in the recession years 1979-1983 alone. (345)

While this study is not intended as a detailed exploration of the economic causes or long-term social implications of deindustrialization, the cultural effects of the decline in the manufacturing sector and its gradual movement from the Rust Belt to the Sun Belt provided the socio-economic historical background to the appearance of certain post-classical Hollywood sports business films—one of the best examples being the ice hockey *Slap Shot* (George Roy Hill, 1977).

***Slap Shot* (1977): Working Class Anxiety in the Face of Downsizing in 1970s America**

Slap Shot engages with the concept of deindustrialization by exploring the issue of unemployment due to the sharp decline in the manufacturing sector of the United States' economy in the 1970s. The main narrative centers on a financially depressed minor league hockey team in the American Rust Belt, the mythical Charlestown Chiefs, whose players must deal with the fact that, since the town's mill is closing, the team will cease to exist the following season.

Slap Shot directly addresses this issue by following the actions of blue-collar hockey players as they contemplate their future job prospects. Soon after the players learn the team will fold, they all express consternation over their potential job prospects. This idea is epitomized in a scene during a game when one of the rank-and-file players exclaims, after learning he is going to be unemployed, "Friggin' Chrysler plant, here I come!" The irony of this statement is that, even though this player is suggesting he will be required to take an unfulfilling factory job, the social and economic reality of that time period indicates that many of the high-paying American factory jobs will soon be eliminated, and he is unlikely to find any employment, at least at a comparable wage, as the U.S. manufacturing sector continues to decline.

Another scene that delivers pertinent social commentary on the depressed state of the American manufacturing sector occurs when the player/coach, Reggie Dunlap (Paul Newman) and his best player Ned Braden (Michael Ontkean) learn about the closing of the town's mill. Walking among the obviously downtrodden employees carrying their lunchboxes and thermoses outside the dingy gates of the mill with smoke belching from the stacks in the background, the following conversation provides trenchant commentary on the plight of the American workforce in the wake of downsizing and deindustrialization of the U.S. manufacturing sector:

NED: What are these poor fuckers going to do when they close the mill?

REGGIE: They ain't closing the mill. They're just jackin' the guys around so they feel happy they've got jobs. It's the old tactic, the mind fuck.

NED: They announced it this morning. April 1, they shut it tight. 10,000 workers have been placed on waivers.

REGGIE: What are they going to do with them?

NED: I don't know. Every sucker for himself, I guess.

This scene, along with several more from *Slap Shot* portraying players and coaches lamenting the decline of their athletic careers or failure to get a college education, all reinforce the collective anxiety experienced by many Americans in response to deindustrialization and downsizing as major social concerns in the United States during the late 1970s and into the 1980s.

Slap Shot also delivers a twist on Hollywood's portrayal of the corporate antagonist¹⁹, as embodied through the team owner. Throughout the film, the identity of the team ownership remains unclear, which helps augment the faceless yet menacing perception of corporate society

¹⁹ *Slap Shot* builds on the concept of the corporate antagonist and corporate villainy as espoused in chapter 1 of this study regarding the films cited as examples of this thematic element in the earliest stages of the American sports business film trend.

prevalent in 1970s American culture. The question of team ownership first arises during a poker game in the bus on an extended road trip early in the film. Ned Braden, wearing a card dealer's visor and collecting a pile of cash after a winning a big pot, boasts to his companions, "My goal is to win all your contracts, become the owner of this team, run it my way. I'd make a fortune." One of the frustrated players, who just lost at poker, then asks Reggie Dunlap, "Who owns the Chiefs?" Reggie responds, "The corporation owns the team. Who cares, you get your check, right?" Reggie's knee-jerk description of "the corporation" owning the Chiefs can be viewed as a general commentary on the faceless, impersonal, and indifferent qualities often ascribed to corporations in Hollywood films.

Another key representation in this scene centers on Ned Braden's ambitions as an athlete considering his business options after his playing career, as illustrated through his comment and demeanor regarding his desire to buy out all of his teammates' contracts and run the team his own way. An important quality of Ned Braden's character is that he is represented as more cultured and better educated than the majority of his teammates. Several times throughout the film, characters mention the fact that Ned comes from an upper class background. For instance, during a radio program early in the film featuring both Reggie Dunlap and Ned Braden, the difference between Ned and the other hockey players is clearly illustrated. In the interview, the announcer refers to Reggie as a member of the "old guard in hockey, rising through the ranks." In contrast, he calls attention to Ned's background indicating, "On the other side of the scale, we have Ned Braden, who is a college graduate and an American citizen." This distinction pointed out by the radio announcer is a significant theme explored in the rest of the film in relation to the difference between Ned, representative of the upper class, and his working class teammates. For instance, in contrast to the other hockey players, Ned never shows concern about his finances,

and even has enough money to bail out three of his jailed Neanderthal-like teammates (the Hansen Brothers) who were arrested for assaulting numerous fans and players from the opposing team. Ned even proves to be more willing to part with his own money than even the team's general manager, the latter of whom tries to bargain down the bail price with the attending police officer.

While presented as a minor sub plot, Ned Braden's character is a nascent manifestation of a filmic athlete being responsible enough with his earnings to not only gain stability in life after professional sports but also flourish in the world of business and finance. Athlete characters such as Ned Braden start to appear with greater frequency in subsequent American sports business films, and eventually leads to a new type of non-athlete sports film protagonist that will be identified later in this chapter.

Returning to the identity of the faceless owner, Reggie Dunlap must concoct a false story about a Florida retirement community that might want to buy and relocate the Chiefs to eventually learn that the owner of the hockey team is a woman of substantial wealth by the name of Anita McCambridge.²⁰ When Reggie finally meets the owner, it is at her upscale suburban home, which is in sharp contrast to the run-down apartments and cheap hotels depicted throughout the film where most of the players reside. After she invites him into her home and they engage in some pleasantries over drinks, she tells Reggie that she is pleased with the team's performance, both on the ice and with ticket sales. However, she blatantly informs Reggie that, even though the team is doing well and that she could probably find an interested buyer for the

²⁰ The name of the owner, Anita McCambridge—obviously draws phonetically from one of the most exclusive institutions in the world, the University of Cambridge—which makes her name sounds more elitist than the names of the other film character, such as Reggie Dunlap, Ned Braden, Dave “Killer” Carlson, and so on. This sharp contrast helps position Anita McCambridge as even more detached from the players on her team, or her work force, which, in turn helps cast her more specifically as the corporate villain in *Slap Shot*.

team, she plans to fold the team because the tax break for claiming bankruptcy is greater than what she could potentially make in a sale. Deflated by her response, Reggie makes one last appeal to her suggesting, “We’re [the hockey players] human beings.” Unaffected by his plea, she disregards his concerns about what happens to the players [workers] and coldly informs Reggie, “I don’t think you understand finance.” Through this scene, Anita McCambridge openly declares that the bottom line supersedes any concern she might have for her employees as result of her business decisions.²¹ Consequently, even though she takes a unique form as a strong-willed, independent woman rather than the stereotypical old white male, fat cat corporate figure, Anita McCambridge is emblematic of post-classical Hollywood’s take on the sports business film corporate antagonist.

Ultimately, through the dialogue between Reggie and Anita and other scenes devoted to the consequences of professional sports team bankruptcy and the subsequent loss of jobs, *Slap Shot* delivers a powerful statement regarding the overall heartless nature of corporate finance when considering the effects on the workforce in terms of downsizing. Moreover, themes relating to finance in professional team sports and downsizing and new character types such as Ned Braden’s in *Slap Shot* also mark important developments in the emergence of the post-classical Hollywood sports business film as a recognizable trend in modern production. The inclusion of these business elements reflective of the 1970s American economy further substantiate *Slap Shot* as indicative of the social and economic generative mechanisms brought

²¹ Before Reggie storms out of Anita’s house and tells her she is “fucked for not selling the team,” he delivers a series of invective statements informing her that he thinks her son “looks like a fag” and that she should get married soon because her son “might end up with a cock in his mouth.” These statements, uttered by Paul Newman’s character, a representative of the American white male working class, can be viewed as a commentary on the perceived threat both feminism and homosexuality posed to white male hegemony in popular culture at that time in American history. While these concepts are evident in this scene and all throughout the film, representations of gender and sexual orientation are outside the parameters of this study. Regardless, the overt denigration of feminism and sexual orientation in *Slap Shot* deserve more in depth exploration and analysis in future studies.

on by the early effects of neoliberalism on the United States economy at work in the emerging sub-category of American sports business film.

Bull Durham: The Plight of the Aging Worker in 1980s Neoliberal American Society

In providing commentary on the plight of older members in the American work force during the introduction of neoliberalism in the 1970s-1980s, *Bull Durham* (Ron Shelton, 1988) features themes relating to this specific social issue evident in post-classical Hollywood sports business films. This occurs through multiple references to players' contracts, which often allude to the fact that minor league baseball players operate as a low-paid workforce reflective of this trend in American society overall within other professions. In this way, *Bull Durham* builds on the character types by featuring an example of an aging athlete main character, "Crash" Davis (Kevin Costner), facing the end of his playing career evident in other post-classical Hollywood sports business films from the 1970s. According to William J. Baumol, Alan S. Blinder, and Edward N. Wolff, while downsizing during the 1980s-1990s caused genuine unfavorable disruptions in the American labor force, mass media, especially mainstream newspapers greatly affected the perception and even exaggerated the effects of downsizing in popular culture.²² In their analysis of *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* over a three-year period examining 1,700 newspaper articles on the subject of downsizing, the authors found the both newspapers commonly identified unskilled, older employees, often referred to as "middle-aged men without college degrees" as the group most adversely affected by downsizing (Baumol, Blinder, and Wolff 28-48). Crash Davis, given his identity as a lifetime journeyman minor

²² During the 1980s-1990s, the authors of this study determined that downsizing during this time period in U.S. History was more nuanced than what was reported in popular culture. While the manufacturing sector of the U.S. economy experienced the greatest downturn in total number of employees, other sector, such as the service and retail economies experienced significant upsizing during the same time period (Baumol, Blinder, and Wolff 93). However, the authors further content that the overall effects of downsizing "tended to depress wages and workers' total compensation." (Baumol, Blinder, and Wolff 261)

league baseball player at the end of his career, stands as an exemplary filmic manifestation of this middle-aged uneducated worker represented in popular culture at large during the 1980-1990s. Moreover, Crash Davis operates a continuation of the post-classical Hollywood sports business film athlete protagonists facing bleak career options at the end of their playing careers.

Along with featuring the brevity of athletes' playing careers, *Bull Durham* also exhibits themes consistent with post-classical Hollywood sports business films by focusing on the volatility of the modern American work force and the increasing disposable nature of corporate employees during this time in history. This concept is featured in *Bull Durham* through various scenes depicting players living in fear of being cut from the team and when they actually get cut from the team. The theme of older workers being cast aside in favor of younger workers is vividly illustrated through one of the main plot points featuring Crash Davis, a veteran catcher with diminishing physical talent but great knowledge of the game, who is exclusively brought to the Durham Bulls at the expense of his own career to help develop a young phenom pitcher, Eddie Calvin "Nuke" LaLoosh (Tim Robins). Once Crash helps Nuke develop as an effective pitcher and Nuke gets called up to the major league team, Crash is summarily released from the team to bring in a younger catcher. When Joe "Skip" Riggins (Trey Wilson) calls Crash into this office, he uses the same exact line from earlier in the film when releasing another player lamenting, "This is the toughest job a manager has. But the organization has decided to make a change..." The repetition of this particular line of dialogue is significant in that Skip's "canned" response for cutting players can be viewed as reflective of the manner in which long-time employees outside of sports, especially from the manufacturing sector due to the deindustrialization of the American economy during the 1980s-1990s, might have heard something similar when enduring the firing process. Moreover, the firing scenes in *Bull Durham*

help re-create this uncomfortable atmosphere in the world of minor league sports representative of other lines of work in American society. In addition, the *Bull Durham* firing scenes further dramatizing the personal effects of people losing their jobs in the restructuring of the American economy guided by neoliberal policies and practices,. Representations like this are consistent with the way film athlete protagonists were depicted enduring similar fates from post-classical Hollywood sports business trend.

***Major League* (1989): Aging Athletes, Corporate Antagonists, and Team Relocations**

Major League (David S. Ward, 1989) is another example of a post-classical Hollywood sports business film that builds on the character types and themes from its 1970s predecessors. The film explores specific themes pertaining to the early effects of neoliberalism on the American economy in the 1980s-1990s in relation to deindustrialization, specifically, the effects of the relocation of the manufacturing sector from the Rust Belt to the Sun Belt. While classified mainly as a light-hearted comedy, *Major League* calls attention to the perception of owners treating their workforces poorly, and as tools to help maximize profits with little regard to their workers' long-term security.

For instance, the main character, Jake Taylor (Tom Berenger), is a doppelganger to Crash Davis' character in *Bull Durham*. Both Jake and Crash are long-time professional catchers past their prime with limited value to their respective teams beyond the immediate future in helping develop younger players into major league talent. Another important dimension of Jake Taylor's typical of the aging athlete post-classical Hollywood sports business film protagonist is that he has little concern or plans for life after baseball. This concept is illustrated when Jake, competing for the affections of his long-lost love interest, Lynn Weslin (Rene Russo), against her current boyfriend, Tom "the Lawyer" (Richard Pickeren) arrives uninvited to a dinner party at Tom's

upscale apartment. Unfazed by Jake's intrusion, Tom condescendingly welcomes him into his home, with the intention to embarrass Jake in front of his wealthy guests and, most especially, Lynn. After offering Jake a beer and engaging in banal chitchat, Tom directly asks Jake about his plans once his playing career is over, suspecting that Jake will be caught off guard by this question. Jake answers flippantly, "Something will come up." Tom, with a wry smile, responds, "Will it?" While this scene is intended to augment the dramatic tension between the two men competing for the same women as part of *Major League*'s romantic sub-plot, Jake Taylor's uncertain financial future operates as a representation of many real life professional athletes—especially the older ones whose careers started before free agency—who often failed to adequately prepare for their financial future at the completion of their playing careers. In addition, Jake could be seen as a representative of aging workers in general outside professional sports in American society facing similar bleak financial prospects after retirement.

Along with Jake Taylor existing as a typical post-classical Hollywood sports business film athlete protagonist, *Major League* also features a new athlete character type: one that is successful both on the field of play and in the business world. In contrast to Jake Taylor, another aging athlete in a supporting role from *Major League*, Roger Dorn (Corbin Bernsen), not only has plans for life after baseball, but has also amassed considerable wealth due to successful business investments using his earnings as a player. The appearance of a wealthy athlete with sharp business acumen such as Roger Dorn in *Major League* is a new development in terms of character types in post-classical Hollywood sports business films that is mainly absent in its filmic predecessors. One potential generative mechanism leading to the appearance of a wealthy professional athlete with good financial prospects at the end of his career such as Roger Dorn likely came from the increasing number of real-life professional athletes in the 1980s that took

advantage of free agency to negotiate higher salaries. In addition, many of these savvy professional athletes acquired endorsement deals to boost their net worth, and had the foresight to invest wisely in lucrative business ventures for their long-term financial stability. For instance, famous athletes such as Michael Jordan, Wayne Gretzky, Ervin “Magic” Johnson, Dan Marino, among others were well known not only for their athletic prowess but also for their successful business ventures during and after their playing careers. While many professional athletes squandered their substantially large salaries due to poor money management or failed business ventures, a growing number of current and former professional athletes are now powerful business moguls, both in and outside the world of professional team sports. More importantly, athletes succeeding in the business world both during and after their playing careers has gained much attention in American popular culture, including Hollywood sports film production from 1990s-2000s such as *Any Given Sunday* (Oliver Stone, 1999), *For the Love of the Game* (Sam Rami, 1999), *Mr. 3000* (Charles Stone, III, 2004), *The Game Plan* (Andy Fickman, 2007), and *Moneyball* (Bennett Miller, 2011) to name a few.²³

The contrast between Roger Dorn and Jake Taylor in terms of long-term financial stability for athletes at the end of their playing careers is illustrated during a scene when the two meet at Dorn’s mansion. While Jake is there to discuss the well being of the team, Dorn automatically assumes he is there to ask him for financial advice, telling him that he can “turn him on to a great investment guy.” Jake, sitting in front of a big screen television featuring a business program with stock prices scrolling across the bottom of the screen, aware of his own depressed financial state, responds, “I don’t have much of a portfolio right now.” When Jake confronts Dorn about deliberately missing a ground ball just to spite one of the starting pitchers,

²³ These financially well-off athlete characters begin to appear with greater frequency and take on more significant narrative emphasis in subsequent post-classical Hollywood sports business films, which will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter.

Rick “Wild Thing” Vaughn (Charlie Sheen), and how actions like that might cost the team the pennant, Dorn openly expresses that he is only concerned with himself. He blatantly tells Jake, “Cut the rah-rah shit, Taylor. Year after this, I go free agent. Plus, me and my agent have a couple of plans after baseball. So I’m not about to risk major injury... for a collection of stiff.” These particular lines of dialogue between two veteran players coupled with the scene’s mise-en-scene are significant in calling attention to the increased public awareness of the effects of free agency in professional sports and athletes placing greater concern over their own careers rather than the team’s success. In addition, it also provides an unprecedented filmic representation of the increasing number of athletes in actuality preparing for life after sports in terms of successful business ventures rather than the typical washed-up, financially broke ex-athlete figures common in both classical Hollywood sports films and the early stages of the post-classical Hollywood sports business film trend. These new athlete-turned successful businessmen stand as predecessors and an intermediate step leading to the development of a new type of non-athlete sports film protagonists, which will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter, as a significant development in American sports business films produced in the 1990s-2000s.

Major League draws upon the concept of deindustrialization in a unique fashion by featuring a corporate antagonist, Rachel Phelps (Margaret Whitton), the female owner of the Cleveland Indians, attempting to move the team to the Sun Belt through a surreptitious business deal with the city Miami, Florida.²⁴ *Major League* draws on a series of the socio-historic events in the world of professional sports, starting with the events surrounding the 1984 Baltimore Colts

²⁴ Along with being another example of a female sports business film corporate/owner antagonist similar to Anita McCambridge in *Slap Shot* (1977), Rachel Phelps’ plan to staff her team with sub-par talent to reduce attendance so that she can break her lease with the city and move the Cleveland Indians to Miami, is reminiscent of Judge Banner’s plan in *The Natural* (1984) to produce a losing team so he can gain control of the New York Knights as the team’s sole owner, both of which build on the theme of unscrupulous corporate practices as represented in American sports business films.

move to Indianapolis. The Colts' move from Baltimore to Indianapolis was the first of many that would occur in subsequent years including the Cleveland Browns to Baltimore, St. Louis Cardinals to Arizona, all of which were all reflective of the overall trend of American businesses in the 1980s-1990s moving their operation from the Rust Belt to cities in the Sun Belt. As populations shifted from the Rust Belt to the Sun Belt following the manufacturing jobs in these new locales, professional sports organization such as the NFL, NBA, MLB, and NHL responded by expanding their leagues with new franchises in many Southern cities and states such as Arizona, Florida, Texas, and the Carolinas.²⁵ When said leagues failed to grant expansion franchises to these Southern cities, certain teams from the Rust Belt were enticed to move to the Sun Belt, which were offered generous tax incentives and publically funded stadiums in the process.²⁶ As a result of these widespread relocations of professional sports teams in the United States during the 1980s-1990s, *Major League* can be seen as an apt filmic representation commenting on the effects of neoliberal policies and their contribution to accelerating deindustrialization of the U.S. economy in relation to the population shifts during the 1970s-1990s and its affects on professional sports as people followed the jobs from the Rust Belt to the Sun Belt.

A New Species of Sports Business Film Hero: the Non-Athlete Sports Protagonist (NASP)

Sports films produced in the 1980s-1990s featured many of the same themes, narrative tropes, and character types indicative of the overall trend in 1970s American sports business films. As neoliberalism took hold in the United States during the 1980s-1990s as a set of

²⁵ Professional sports team expansion franchises in the Sun Belt: NFL: Carolina Panthers (1995), Jacksonville Jaguars (1995); NBA: Orlando Magic (1989), Miami Heat (1988), Charlotte Hornets (1988); MLB: Arizona Diamondbacks (1998), Tampa Bay Rays (1998); NHL: San Jose Sharks (1991), Tampa Bay Lightning (1992), Florida Panthers (1993), Mighty Ducks of Anaheim (1993).

²⁶ Professional sports team franchise relocations to the Sun Belt in the 1980s-1990s: NFL: St. Louis Cardinals to Arizona (1988); NBA: Kansas City Kings to Sacramento (1985); NHL: Minnesota North Stars to Dallas (1993), Winnipeg Jets to Phoenix Coyotes (1996), Hartford Whalers to North Carolina (Carolina Hurricanes, 1997).

economic practices and a form of “common sense” emphasizing the importance of individual responsibility in all aspects of existence, a new type of sports business film emerged. These post-classical Hollywood sports business films inspired by some of the economic and social consequences brought on by fin de siècle free-market principles provided audiences with new themes, narrative tropes, and character types relating to the business side of professional sports. Guided by this renewed sense of rugged American individualism as reimagined by neoliberal philosophies, non-athlete sports film characters began to supplant traditional athlete protagonists as the main characters in contemporary post-classical Hollywood sports business films. This new main character type appears as non-athlete characters that often represent the business side of professional sports in the form of sports agents, team managers, and or coaches. Moreover, athlete film characters begin to occupy supporting roles and take on secondary narrative importance in post-classical Hollywood sports business films.

For the purposes of this study, I will refer to these types of characters as “non-athlete sports protagonists” (NASP). This classification includes a wide range of non-athlete sports protagonists that are representative of the business side of sports, such as sports agents in film such as *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996), along with other non-athlete film protagonists that appear as team owners, managers, coaches, and sports reporters. Willie Osterweil in his April 24, 2014 *Al Jazeera* article “The Rise of the Sports Management Film,” supports this by indicating, “The evolution of sports movies reflects a shift [where] the business side of sports has become ubiquitous...and the central narrative of the sports movie is being displaced from the feats of the actual athletes to the ‘struggles’ of the manager, the coach, the publicist, the agent.” The appearance of these NASPs in sports films produced in the mid 1990s and into the 2000s stands as one of the most distinguishing and unique characteristics that helps qualify these films

as a distinct stage of development in post-classical American sports business film affected by the spread of neoliberalism in the United States.

While *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996) is widely recognized as the prototypical film in popular cinema in presenting this type of non-athlete sports protagonist, other Hollywood sports films made prior to *Jerry Maguire* feature similar NASPs with athletes occupying supporting roles. For example, *Talent for the Game* (Robert M. Young, 1991) and *The Scout* (Michael Ritchie, 1994) contain NASPs—talent scouts played by Edward James Olmos and Albert Brooks, respectively—both of whom are the main characters while their athlete counterparts exist as supporting characters in the overall narrative. In the same way, films such as *Little Big League* (Andrew Scheinman, 1994), which features a 12-year old boy as the owner/manager of the Minnesota Twins baseball organization, and the baseball biopic *Cobb* (Ron Shelton, 1994), which features Robert Wuhl as Ty Cobb's biographer, both position non-athletes as the main film characters. The appearance of non-athlete sports film protagonists marked a gradual shift in narrative emphasis from athlete main characters to protagonist representative of the business side of American professional team sports. Consequently, *Jerry Maguire* serves as the archetype of this new type of sports film protagonist as a milestone in the second stage of development in the post-Hollywood sports business film trend.

Among this growing body of Hollywood sports business films that feature non-athlete sports protagonists and follow narratives representative of the business side of professional sports include the aforementioned *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996), along with *Any Given Sunday* (Oliver Stone, 1999), *The Replacements* (Howard Deutch, 2000), *Two for the Money* (D. J. Caruso, 2005), *Invincible* (Ericson Core, 2006), *Moneyball* (Bennett Miller, 2011), *Trouble with the Curve* (Robert Lorenz, 2012), *42* (Brian Helgeland 2013), *Draft Day* (Ivan Reitman,

2014), and *Million Dollar Arm* (Craig Gillespie, 2014). Other Hollywood productions that qualify as sports business films and featuring non-athlete sports protagonists include the college athletics corruption films *Necessary Roughness* (Stan Dragoti, 1991), *Blue Chips* (William Friedkin, 1994), and *He Got Game* (Spike Lee, 1998), along with the horse racing biopics *Seabiscuit* (Gary Ross, 2003) and *Secretariat* (Randall Wallace, 2010).²⁷ All these films exhibit unique elements as a new stage of development in post-classical Hollywood sports business film production trend in the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st century. Primary among these new developments in this new sub-category of the sports film genre is the increased appearance of non-athlete sports protagonists and their importance in terms of narrative emphasis and screen time.

While the appearance of non-athlete sports protagonists from post-classical Hollywood sports business films stand in contrast to the traditional athlete protagonists from classical Hollywood sports films, these non-athlete protagonists occupy similar positions as points of identification for contemporary audiences. Deborah Tudor supports this notion, “The film star, and the athlete-star both signify a range of ideological qualities that are important at distinct historical periods. Thus, the dominant type of athlete-star and film star may change over time and from sport to sport” (11-12). As the post-classical Hollywood sports business film trend developed, athlete characters began to take on lesser importance as the main protagonists, and non-athlete characters started to occupy more important roles in the execution of the main narrative. Along with identifying the appearance of non-athlete sports protagonists in American sports films produced during the mid 1990s-2000s, this study examines key socio-historic and

²⁷ While these films qualify as examples of contemporary American sports business films, since they do not deal specifically with professional team sports, they are excluded as sites of analysis for the purposes of this study. Regardless, they exist as potential sites of analysis for future studies to include the business dimension of collegiate athletics and individual sports in terms of the cultural effects of neoliberalism and free market economics on American popular culture.

economic generative mechanisms that gave rise to their appearance as part of this developing trend in Hollywood production. Identifying the appearance of non-athlete sports protagonists in American sports business films produced during the 1990-2000s and beyond requires examining some of these generative mechanisms regarding the interplay between their economic, sociological, and cultural implications on American society at the time of their production. Moreover, the heroic qualities ascribed to rugged individualism in American culture during the latter half of the 20th century, as reimagined through the lens of neoliberal philosophies, can be viewed as one of the most influential generative mechanisms in the appearance of non-athlete sports protagonists in post-classical Hollywood sports business films.

As previously stated, neoliberalism is a multifaceted phenomenon that reaches far beyond politics and economics, and comprises a detailed reconceptualization of proper citizenship in contemporary capitalist society. One of neoliberalism's most effective means of influencing the economic developments of various nations throughout the world during the latter half of the 20th century was its widespread acceptance as a form of "common sense" and code of conduct, based on various free market principles, most especially, rugged individualism, that informs every aspect of one's existence and behavior. Michel Foucault speaks of this mode of common sense that is "conceived in neoliberalism as an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life" (qtd. in Brown 30). As a result, neoliberal ideas and philosophies spread beyond the economic and political worlds, leading to a potentially greater infiltration into the mindset of citizens as they navigate the new political, economic, and social landscapes created by fin de siècle global capitalism.

Many of the leading free market capitalist proponents believed that the best way to spread neoliberal philosophies to the general population was outside the realm of economics. Friedrich Hayek, one of the most influential neoliberal scholars, “advised his colleagues to explain free-market ideas to the public including politicians, students, journalists, businessmen, academics, and anyone interested in public policy” (Mudge, 712). Hayek firmly believed that in educating the public about the so-called “common sense” benefits of neoliberalism, which asserts, “The free market argument assumes that economic and social agents are rational and fully aware of their own preferences and capable of making all the calculations necessary to pursue their interests efficiently” (Schotter 2, 5). Under this assumption, the concept of individualism and individual responsibility stand as the most important guiding principles in all aspects of human existence and the ultimate determinants of success or failure. Andrew Schotter supports this idea within neoliberalism by asserting, “The individual is the fundamental unit of the social structure, and that social outcomes will be optimized if individuals are left free to barter and exchange” (17). Kean Birch and Adam Tickell add, “The utopian vision of a free market society [is marked] by a minimalist state that functions only to secure individual liberty and the law of contract” (Birch and Mykhnenko 57).

In addition, neoliberalism’s emphasis on individual responsibility as the guiding mode in all aspects of human conduct suggest that any failure is either attributed to too much governmental interference or lack of effort or talent by the individual. In this way, invoking the individual responsibility argument can easily deflect criticism of neoliberal policies, even though this is an obvious oversimplification of reality. Moreover, this individual responsibility philosophy often eschews genuine external economics and social factors—such as poverty, gender, race, etc.—that frequently stand as insurmountable obstacles for many people being able

to succeed financially and socially as defined by the tenets of neoliberalism. As such, representations of the individual responsibility concept embedded in popular culture text such as films and television programs operate as an effective means of promulgating the benefits of neoliberalism while simultaneously eliding its drawbacks as slight aberrations rather than as endemic problems within the system.

***Homo economicus*: The Self-Reliant Man in Post-Classical Sports Business Films**

Andrew Schotter suggests that the concept of individuals operating in a capitalist society to freely barter and exchange with other individual agents without external interference from government or regulation is the cornerstone of contemporary neoliberal practice (5). Kean Birch and Vlad Mykhnenko add that under neoliberal thought, “Individuals are encouraged to compete in flexible labor markets that depend on entrepreneurship, life-long learning, and transferrable skills (that is employability) by shifting responsibility for social justice, well-being, and health outcomes from the state to the individual” (5). The contemporary manifestation of this individual operating in a free market society is embodied through what is known as *homo economicus* or the “Economic Man.” Neoliberal scholars and advocates point to the concept of *homo economicus* as the ideal citizen in modern capitalist society, with an unwavering faith that, under this laissez faire system, individuals guided by their own “selfish” interest will be able to realize their greatest potential as economic and social agents in a democratic society. In reality, individual ability and achievement alone rarely brings the type of success idealized through neoliberal philosophy, and individual accomplishment is determined by a wide range of factors, including gender, race, class, education, etc.; however, this hypothetical concept remains at the center of neoliberal philosophy and exists as the only acceptable mode of conduct for the individual in modern capitalist culture.

The corporate dominated American mass media system generates multiple examples of *homo economicus* in a wide range of popular culture texts, especially Hollywood films, which provide over simplifications of the individual responsibility narrative in action. In addition, the appearance of non-athlete sports film protagonists (NASPs) in post-classical Hollywood sports business films—often portrayed by popular Hollywood movie stars such as Tom Cruise, and Brad Pitt, etc.—helps legitimize the individual responsibility narrative in neoliberal thought as a form of common sense rather than exceptions to what actually occurs in reality.

Many different historical imaginations of *homo economicus* appear in American culture and scholarship. Wendy Brown provides the following terse, yet apt, history *homo economicus*' evolution in American society:

“Two hundred years ago, the figure famously drawn by Adam Smith was that of a merchant or trader who relentlessly pursued his own interests through exchange. One hundred years ago, Jeremy Bentham reconceived the idea as the individual avoiding pain and pursuing pleasure through endless cost-benefit calculations. Thirty years ago, at the dawn of the neoliberal era, *homo economicus* was still oriented by interest and profit seeking, but now entrepreneurialized itself at every turn and was formulated as human capital. (32)

Regarding the neoliberal concept of the figure, Michel Feher suggests, “*homo economicus*, as human capital, is concerned with enhancing its portfolio value in all domains of its life, an activity undertaken through the practice of self-investment and attracting investors” (21). Michel Foucault’s figuration of *homo economicus*, as espoused in his 2004 posthumously published text *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979*, “Takes shape as human capital seeking to strengthen its competitive positioning and appreciate its value, rather than as a

figure of exchange of interest (Brown 33). The contemporary manifestation of *homo economicus* draws on many of the historic imaginations of the figure, but has evolved in specific ways that differentiate *homo economicus* from its previous forms.

One of the most distinguishing elements drawing from neoliberal economic philosophy regarding the contemporary idea of *homo economicus* is the replacement of human labor with human capital and self-entrepreneurialism as the primary focus in maximizing one's individual success in competitive markets. At the most basic level, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as "the skills the labor force possesses and is regarded as a resource or asset." According to Claudia Goldin, human capital "encompasses the notion that there are investments in people (e.g., education, training, health, etc.), and that these investments increase an individual's productivity" (1).

In *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, Book II*, Adam Smith indicates that human capital is "the acquisition of talents during education, study, or apprenticeship are part of his fortune and likewise that of society." Wendy Brown adds, "When competition becomes the market's root principle, all market actors are rendered as capitals, rather than as producers, sellers, workers, clients, of consumers...and every subject is rendered as entrepreneurial" (65). Michel Foucault asserts, "The individual's life itself—with his relationships to private property...with his family, household, insurance, and retirement---must make him into a sort of permanent and multiple enterprise" (241). While human labor is an important component of *homo economicus*, under neoliberal thought, human capital is essential in maximizing an individual's ability to best take advantage of the opportunities offered by the free market system. Neoliberal citizens are imagined as concentrated personal enterprises that are responsible for every aspect of their own well-being and financial security. As a result, a new

type of neoliberalism inspired *homo economicus* figure has arisen that stands in sharp contrast to the Keynesian citizen of the past.

All of these imaginations help inform one of the most recent manifestation of *homo economicus* as a form of human capital through what is known as the emerging “gig economy” in 21st century capitalism. David Schepp from *CBS News* indicates in his January 2, 2016 article “Just How Big is the Gig Economy?” that while the gig economy is in the process of being classified by scholars and pundits, *The Project Management* website provides the following definition as a starting point, “A gig economy is an environment in which temporary positions are common and organizations contract with independent workers for short-term engagements.” Successful companies such as Uber, Airbnb, TaskRabbit, Instacart, and many other companies offering what *NRP*’s Geoff Nunberg calls “solopreneurs and free range humans with portfolio careers,” the freedom and ability to barter for themselves by utilizing any and all aspects of their, including person and property, in maximizing their earning potential. As many ways, with its emphasis on citizens promoting themselves as forms of human capital in a perpetual state of development and adaptation, the gig economy can be viewed as a neoliberal “utopia” that exists in contemporary reality with *homo economicus* at its center.

Beyond the flexibility this new development in the service industry offers to citizens to “freely” barter for themselves in contemporary global capitalism, the principles of neoliberalism appear to be operating in full force in the new gig economy by allowing companies such as Uber and Airbnb to operate at substantially lower labor costs in the range of 20%-30% less than similar service such as traditional taxicabs and hotels. Sarah Kessler asserts in her February 17, 2015 article “The Gig Economy Won’t Last Because it is Being Sued to Death” from *Fastcompany.com*, “What makes companies such as Uber unique is that their main workforce,

the drivers, do not actually work for the company; they are independent contractors who are responsible for all overhead costs and take the blame if anything goes wrong, while the parent company provides no benefits such as sick leave and takes a 15% to 20% commission of every hour worked.”²⁸ Start up companies formed through this business model are in many ways ingenious and efficient manifestations of neoliberalism in action; however, these gig economy firms also expose the ways in which neoliberalism exploits workforces through applying the personal responsibility narrative in such an extreme manner as stated above.

***Jerry Maguire* (1996): Enter the Non-Athlete Sports Film Protagonist in Popular Cinema**

As previously indicated, *Jerry Maguire* stands as both the archetype and epitome of the non-athlete sports protagonist represented in post-classical Hollywood sports films. Both the overall narrative and the main character of Jerry Maguire (Tom Cruise) exemplify many of the qualities ascribed to neoliberalism’s conception of *homo economicus*. This is first illustrated by the way in which Jerry Maguire forced to strike out on his own in the business world after being fired from a powerful sports management firm. Throughout the film, Jerry Maguire promotes himself as a form of human capital and in a constant state of adaption and reinventing himself and his methods of operation as a sports agent in rebuilding his failing career. The film establishes this as his primary narrative motivation, which adheres to the idea of individual responsibility in determining his ultimate fate typical of *homo economicus* in neoliberal society.

While the majority of the film extols the qualities of *homo economicus* embodied by the main character, the opening scene provides a fitting introduction to the non-athlete sports protagonist in post-classical Hollywood sports business films as a new imagination of *homo economicus* in popular culture. In addition, this segment helps illustrate some of the effects elicited by contemporary global capitalism/neoliberalism as a generative mechanism in the

²⁸ (<http://www.fastcompany.com/3042248/the-gig-economy-wont-last-because-its-being-sued-to-death>).

narrative focus and thematic representations of fin de siècle post-classical Hollywood sports films. The first image that appears on the screen is that of the famous photograph of Earth taken from space by the Apollo 17 Crew in 1972 known as “The Blue Marble,” which features the African continent at its center surrounded by a series of swirling global weather patterns. As the title “Jerry Maguire” dissolves over the image, the narrator, Tom Cruise states, “So this is the world and there are almost 6 billion people on it.” The scene cuts to the next shot, which occurs as a satellite abruptly crosses the screen to reveal a different photo from space of the Earth. In this new photo, the North American continent is in clear view, with a series of white clouds obscuring both Canada and Mexico to reveal the United States as the primary focus of the image. Once the satellite passes, the narrator continues, “There. That’s better. That’s American. You see, America still sets the tone in the world.” This seemingly trivial aspect of the films’ opening mise-en-scene is actually quite important in illustrating neoliberalism as an important generative mechanism in setting the tone for the film’s overall narrative content and ideological subtext.

In less than 30 seconds of screen time and exposition, this brief passage reminds audiences of the United States’ importance as an entrenched global power, both economically and from a cultural standpoint. The transition from the Blue Marble photo with Africa at its center to the next photo of Earth featuring the United States visually supports this claim by suggesting, even though human civilization began in the Fertile Crescent of Africa, the United States is where all the important developments are taking place in modern society. The fact that the filmmaker uses a satellite as part of the visual transition further accentuates this point by symbolically indicating that this technology developed primarily by the economic system in United States and NASA is what helped bring us from the Ancient world to the advanced modern society in which we exist. In addition, this passage can be viewed as a visual metaphor

regarding the United States' influence in implementing and spreading neoliberal philosophies to the world as a dominating global economic and cultural force in the later half of the 20th century. Moreover, the fact that this information is delivered through a popular Hollywood film with wide distribution featuring a major star further reinforces the idea of American dominance on a global scale.

The scene proceeds as a subtle tribute to classical Hollywood sports film protagonists in the way it features a series of exceptional young American athletes through a montage narrated by Tom Cruise. At the conclusion of this montage, the dramatic introduction of a new type of sports film main character—the non-athlete sports film protagonist—occurs as his character physically enters the visual reality of the film from behind a large bank of televisions featuring various NFL highlights dominating the image. As this image remains on the televisions, the narrator states, “Now, I’m the guy you usually don’t see. I’m the one behind the scenes. I’m the sports agent.” The camera pans from the televisions and focuses on Tom Cruise as Jerry Maguire—an attractive young man wearing a business suit rushing out to meet potential clients at a business conference. As he enters the frame, the final image that appears on the television screen is Joe Montana of the San Francisco 49ers, one of the most iconic football players of the 1980s-1990s. This entrance operates as a symbolic transfer or “hand off” of primary narrative emphasis from athlete protagonists in classical Hollywood sports films to the non-athlete sports film protagonist in post-classical American sports films. This concept is further reinforced as Tom Cruise’s character skillfully navigates his way through the room in a fast-paced montage of him pitching his services to actual NFL coaches and players from the real world of professional sports during the 1990s. The act of his character “shaking hands” with NFL athletes and coaches through the *mise-en-scene* is yet another indication of this transference of narrative importance and screen

time dominance from the athlete to the non-athlete sports film protagonist in the forthcoming post-classical American sports business film trend.

Following this scene, the image dissolves to reveal an external shot of a modern skyscraper with Tom Cruise continuing his narration, “Inside that building, that’s where I work. SMI: Sports Management International. Where 33 out of shape agents guiding the careers of 1,685 of the most finely tuned athletes alive.” The scene then dissolves to an interior shot of a corporate boardroom featuring young executives, all dressed in white shirts and ties, led by an older man sitting at the head of the table wearing a full business suit. Over this image, which features Tom Cruise addressing his colleagues, obviously leading the conversation, the narration continues, “I handle the lives, the dreams of 72 clients and get an average of 264 phone calls a day. It’s what I do.” The scene cuts to Tom Cruise on the phone speaking to a client delivering the following pitch in unwavering fashion, “I will not rest until I have you holding a Coke, wearing your own shoe, playing a Sega game featuring you, while singing your own song in a new commercial starring you during the Super Bowl in a game that you are winning, and I will not sleep until that happens. I’ll give you fifteen minutes.” The scene ends with voice-over narration stating, “That’s what I do best.” This fast-paced montage, which provides an inordinate amount of exposition and visual action, mainly serves to inform the main narrative of *Jerry Maguire*; however, it also highlights the introduction of a new type of non-athlete sports film protagonist that would be the first of many in shifting emphasis away from athletes to sports business agents, etc., as the main characters.

These scenes illustrate several points about the emerging trend of the post-classical American sports business film. First, almost all of the visual action takes place in either a boardroom, an office, or at a business conference. Footage of athletes performing on the field is

limited to a brief montage and some video clips illustrated on television screens in the background.²⁹ Unlike classical Hollywood sports films, the majority of screen time and narrative action of post-classical American sports business film occurs in business settings rather than on the field of play. All the exposition delivered up to this point has been provided by the main character, a non-athlete sports film protagonist in the form of a sports business agent, with the athletes serve as background or supplementary roles in the film. As such, this clearly indicates that, even though this a sport-themed film, most of its narrative will focus on the actions of the sports agent rather than a main athlete protagonist. Another important point to take away from this scene is that the most active character(s) are the sports agents. When athletes appear on screen, they clearly play secondary roles or being acted upon rather than conducting the main action. This is an important transition from the way athletes were positioned as the main protagonists and primary narrative emphasis in classical era Hollywood sports films of the past. Finally, through the depiction of Tom Cruise's character tirelessly and skillfully negotiating with potential clients in the most high-profile and competitive American professional sports business enterprise, the National Football League, it serves as a fitting visual encapsulation of what it takes for the individual to succeed in the new global free-market system inspired by the tenets of neoliberalism in the latter part of the 20th century as an idealized form of *homo economicus*.

“Mission Statement” for Non-Athlete Protagonists, Athletes, and the Neoliberal Citizen

The “mission statement” from *Jerry Maguire*, which is a heartfelt critical commentary on the mercenary and ruthless nature of the sports agent business, is a prominent and recurrent narrative motif that drives the main plot of the film.³⁰ In addition, various components of the

²⁹ The main exception is the climatic scene featuring Rod making his stunning catch on *Monday Night Football* during a game between the Arizona Cardinals and the Dallas Cowboys.

³⁰ According to David Wharton in his 2011 *Cinema Blend* article “Read The Jerry Katzenberg Memo That Inspired *Jerry Maguire*’s Mission Statement,” Cameron Crowe, writer and director of *Jerry Maguire*, states that he based the

scenes leading to the main character's creation of the mission statement and several afterwards highlight the clinical modes of operation necessary for the sport agent characters, inspired by neoliberalism's imagination of *homo economicus*, to thrive in contemporary American professional sports. These scenes present filmic representations of the unsympathetic business and social environments in reality generated by neoliberalism's influence and spread in contemporary global capitalism. Moreover, these scenes further illustrate the importance of self-reliance and individuality in neoliberal thought and practice through both the sports agents and the athletes they represent in the film.

The germination of the mission statement occurs soon after Jerry Maguire visits one of his clients in the hospital, an aging hockey player who suffered his fourth concussion during a game. In this scene, the punch drunk hockey player, laying in a hospital bed fitted with a neck brace and his head wrapped in white gauze bandages, has a difficult time remembering his name, but easily recalls his contract stipulation that he must play the upcoming weekend in order to play in 65% of his games to get a bonus for that season. After Jerry Maguire exits the hospital room, the hockey player's son stops him in the hall and asks, "Mr. Maguire? This is his fourth concussion. Shouldn't someone get him to stop?" Jerry Maguire flippantly replies, looking at his pager and avoiding eye contact with the child, "It would take all five of the Super Trooper VR Warriors"—a popular live-action children's program from the mid 1990s—to stop your dad." The son sees through this condescending platitude and tells him to "fuck off." Stunned by the child's insightful and cutting response, Jerry Maguire begins to question his place in the world of professional sports economics. This brief encounter sets in motion his spiral of doubt leading to the creation of his mission statement critical of the mercenary state of the sports business world.

mission statement in the film on an actual 1991 memo from the head of Disney at that time outlining and criticizing the superficial, blockbuster mentality of the Hollywood film business. (<http://www.cinemablend.com/new/Read-Jeffrey-Katzenberg-Memo-Inspired-Jerry-Maguire-Mission-Statement-27808.html>)

The writing and distribution of the mission statement not only initiates the main narrative action of the film it also provides the framework to represent the draconian landscape in both professional sports and the economy at large guided by the principles of neoliberalism and its effects on the citizenry.

From a narrative standpoint, this dramatic scene is intended as a harsh criticism of the unfeeling nature of professional American sports, illustrating how the health of athletes is of secondary concern when compared to matters of finance. However, it also metaphorically calls attention to the cutthroat nature of modern capitalism, focusing on individual responsibility as the primary guiding principle of action in all spheres of life. According to Andrew Schotter, neoliberal philosophies suggest that since “The individual is the fundamental unit of the social structure, he should be totally responsible for himself, which includes planning ahead for every contingency, including injury or other unforeseen acts of misfortune ” (17). Under this assumption, if the individual fails to do so, they only have themselves to blame and are undeserving of outside assistance from either their employer or the government due to their reduced ability to perform their job. The very fact that the hockey player is more aware of the conditions of his contract relating to obtaining a bonus rather than being able to recall his own name is a powerful representation of the endemic individualistic nature of *homo economicus*’ existence in both the world of the film and the reality of contemporary American neoliberal society.

Considering the short career spans of NFL athletes, it is difficult for the average player to count on his ability to play for an extended number of years to earn enough money to last a lifetime simply utilizing his labor as a reliable source of income. While earning the NFL’s league minimum at \$405,000 as of 2013 may seem like an exorbitant compared to the median United

States household income at \$52,250 in 2013,³¹ the average NFL player earning this minimum salary at 3.3 years can expect to make \$1.34 million over the course of his career, which is comparable to the lifetime earnings under the median household income at 20 years (\$1,045,0000). As such, professional athletes, especially in the NFL, are expected to manage a lifetime's worth of income over a very short period of time. Under this truncated time frame, it would difficult for someone with a background in finance to properly execute a life-long financial plan. For the average professional athlete, who spends the majority of his playing career enduring the rigors of a physically and psychologically demanding sports season, this is even more difficult, if not impossible, even with a financial advisor to guide them during their playing careers.

Unlike many athlete characters from the classical era sports films and the post-classical Hollywood sports business in the 1980s-1990s, Rod Tidwell (Cuba Gooding, Jr.), a primary supporting character in *Jerry Maguire*, is acutely aware of the brevity of a professional athlete's playing career. As such, Rod understands the need to maximize his value while he is still in his prime to be able to make enough money for the rest of his life leveraging what he has left of playing career. This is illustrated in a scene on a plane ride home the NFL Draft wherein Rod explains to Jerry, "I've got a shelf life of 10 years, tops. My next contract has got to bring me the dollars that are going to last me and mine a very long time. Shit, I'm out of this sport in five years." While Rod firmly believes he is an elite player, his parent team, the Arizona Cardinals, consider him an above-average wide receiver whose average pay matches his perceived lack of superstar talent on the field and "difficult" personality traits in the locker room.

³¹ <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/acs/acsbr13-02.pdf> (accessed February 20, 2016).

Since Rod is consistently portrayed throughout *Jerry Maguire* to be acutely cognizant of this fact, one of his primary narrative goals is to ensure that Jerry Maguire secures him a favorable deal so he will have earned enough money as a professional football player to avoid financial uncertainty for his family once he retires. Drawing from Rod Tidwell's behavior in the above-described scene, along with others throughout the film, he clearly understands his worth in terms of human capital rather than human labor. In addition, both Rod and his wife, Marcee Tidwell (Rigina King), understand that Rod's earning potential extends beyond his salary as a player and want to explore potential endorsement deals to capitalize on Rod's celebrity as a potential NFL standout. This concept is vividly illustrated when Marcee visits Jerry Maguire in his office when she delivers the following exposition about their intentions in the business world:

This man, my husband, has plan, an image, and when you put him in a waterbed warehouse commercial, you're making him common. When you know we deserve the big four: shoe, car, clothing line, and soft drink. I know about the four jewels of the celebrity endorsement dollar. I majored in marketing, baby, and so did my husband. We came to play.

Through this scene, and others, it is obvious that both he and his family understand that he must maximize his earning potential based on himself as a form of human capital rather than simply the labor he provides his team. As such Rod exhibits many of the traits ascribed to neoliberalism's concept of *homo economicus* in modern global capitalist culture.

Later films such as *Moneyball* (Bennett Miller, 2011), *Trouble with the Curve* (Robert Lorenz, 2012), *42* (Brian Helgeland 2013), *Draft Day* (Ivan Reitman, 2014), and *Million Dollar Arm* (Craig Gillespie, 2014) all draw from the example set by Cameron Crowe's *Jerry Maguire* focusing on the importance of individual achievement, self-reliance, and promoting themselves

as forms of human capital through the various manifestations of NASPs. These popular post-classical American sports business films follow a similar narrative arc with a *homo economicus*/non-athlete protagonist at its center, along with athletes in supporting roles, operating in the complex world of contemporary sports business operations. The common thread in all these films positions individual responsibility narrative to the non-athlete sports film protagonists. More importantly, this strong sense of individuality in relation to one's awareness and ability to utilize their human capital is positioned as one of the most important elements in achieving success in modern capitalist society, both in the world of these films and reality.

Gender Roles in Neoliberal Society: Representations in Hollywood Sports Business Films

The portrayal of female characters in post-classical Hollywood sports business films is worth exploring regarding the effects of neoliberalism on representations of gender, feminism, and the family unit in American popular cinema. According to Wendy Brown:

When *homo economicus* becomes normative across all spheres...and appreciation of human capital becomes the governing truth in all aspects of life...there are two possibilities for women in the sexual division of labor that neoliberal orders continue to depend upon and reproduce. Either women align their own conduct with this truth, becoming *homo economicus*...or women's activities and bearing as *femina domestica*³²...in which case women occupy their old place as unacknowledged props and supplements to masculinist liberal subjects. (104-105)

³² *The New Internationalist Magazine* suggests that there are two versions of *femina domestica*. The first is the main "species" *femina domestica* (the housewife) who mainly a docile figure and "is vital for maintaining her mate in a state of readiness for work, for soothing his frustrations and preventing him rioting at his lack of control over his working life...and neither expects nor receives any cash payments for her work." The second version is known as *femina domestica superioria* (the superwoman), a "sub-species" who considers unpaid domestic work to be her primary and natural role, but also works for cash payments – either because her mate has deserted her, because he earns too little to supply their needs, or because she finds domestic work unsatisfying." In the post-classical Hollywood sports business films explored in this study, most of the female characters qualify as *femina domestica superioria*; however, their primary role in the narrative is to support their male counterparts, with much less

In addition, fin de siècle Hollywood sports business films help subtly perpetuate the impression of gender equality while simultaneously undermining the notion of fairness in the contemporary work place by the ways in which most of the female characters are positioned within the main narrative in the role of the girlfriend or wife. Examining these dimensions, as epitomized through the main female characters and the narrative functions they serve in these films, help illuminate the underlying inequality produced by the tacit yet pervasive masculine identity of neoliberalism's concept of *homo economicus* in the real world of free-market economics.

Based on the assumption that people in a capitalist society succeed or fail based primarily on their individual efforts and talents, neoliberalism theoretically offers equal opportunity for all people irrespective of gender. In this way, neoliberal philosophy appears to create an egalitarian setting for both men and women, and the figure of *homo economicus* exists as an assumed gender-neutral figure in modern capitalist society. Moreover, genuine advances made by feminism through both popular culture and various historic legislative actions in terms of equal access to education and the work place, etc., have helped normalize the concept of presumed gender equality in modern American society, even though great disparity still exists between men and women, especially in earning potential and employment opportunity.³³ Deborah Tudor speaks to this cultural normalization of alleged gender equality indicating, "Neoliberal masculinity has appropriated certain formerly feminists positions...and accommodated shifts in gender definitions...to masquerade itself as far more progressive than it is in reality" (59). Tudor

narrative emphasis or screen time devoted to the specifics of their careers as a consistent filmic element across numerous sports business films such as *Jerry Maguire*, *Trouble with the Curve*, *Draft Day*, and *Million Dollar Arm*. (<http://newint.org/features/1988/03/05/simply>).

³³ According to the *whitehouse.gov*, "Despite passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which requires that men and women in the same work place be given equal pay for equal work, the "gender gap" in pay persists. Full-time women workers' earnings are about only 78% of their male counterparts' earnings. As of 2014, decades of research show that pay discrimination is a real and persistent problem that continues to shortchange American women and their families." (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/equal-pay#top>)

continues, “Neoliberalism has normalized a white male masculinity that can quite easily coexist with certain pragmatic feminist idea, for example, opening the paid labor force to women” (60). In popular films, this egalitarian tone is created through the inclusion of strong, independent female characters in workplace filmic settings as a common theme. This concept is often an underlying element in many post-classical Hollywood sports business films such as *Jerry Maguire*. While many of the female characters in post-classical Hollywood sports business films are portrayed as confident, self-sufficient, accomplished, and intelligent figures in the modern workplace, their main narrative function is almost exclusively intended for them to support their male counterparts as their supportive domestic partners. In the process, these female characters often assume traditional female roles such as child-rearing and other non-paid domestic duties in maintaining a family unit.

Dorothy Boyd (Rene Zellweger) from *Jerry Maguire* is one of the first prominent examples of this dualistic neoliberalism inspired female character type in post-classical Hollywood sports business films. Dorothy is initially portrayed as a struggling yet independent single mother working as an accountant for Sports Management International. At certain points in the film, she exhibits the qualities of a strong-willed individual who is able to take care of herself without needing assistance from anyone as she navigates the world of modern capitalism. Despite these limited favorable representations of independence and self-efficacy, her main narrative function in *Jerry Maguire* is to support him as he starts his own business, even though this decision puts her in a precarious financial situation with the strong possibility of being unable to provide for her son. While she makes the decision to leave Sports Management International based on her desire to live her life in a more ethical manner based on many of the

concepts espoused in Jerry Maguire's mission statement, she occupies a secondary role in relation to his position in the business world, which is clearly evident throughout the film.

The concept of Dorothy Boyd's supporting role in her relationship with Jerry Maguire is most vividly illustrated the morning after the two first had sex when they are awaiting a fax outlining the details of Rod Tidwell's latest contract. As they prepare for Rob and his wife to arrive, the two stand next to each other in silence, as Jerry assembles a plate of muffins and cookies. When she thanks him for being nice to her son over breakfast, he indicates that if they can get a good offer, they can move out of his condo and into a real office. Immediately after this statement, he hands Dorothy the plate of pastries with the intention for her to put them on the table for their clients asking her, "Do you mind?" Dorothy, stunned by his request, holds the plate in disbelief. This particular bit of action is significant in two ways in calling attention to the inherent disparities between men and women in the workplace in neoliberal culture. First, the fact that he hands her a plate of food to put on the kitchen table serves as a powerful metaphor that Dorothy is expected to perform what Wendy Brown calls "unpaid domestic work" and Joan Tronto refers to as "care work" (qt. in Brown 102). In addition, this scene suggests that, even though the two were intimate, he still thinks of her as his employee and not as an equal partner. Moreover, Dorothy's assumed main role in both their business and intimate partnerships is to perform the traditional unpaid domestic duties ascribed to women while Jerry lives out his *homo economicus* destiny unfettered by such menial tasks.

Another important element regarding Dorothy Boyd is that she is marked as a working class woman who appears that she will only be able to "elevate" herself out of her social status by attaching herself to a man from the upper class. This idea is vividly illustrated through the *mise-en-scene* on the plane ride home from the sports agent conference after Jerry Maguire wrote

his famous mission statement. In this scene, Jerry Maguire sits comfortably in first class, surrounded by all the usual luxuries and amenities, sipping champagne from a fluted glass, eating a gourmet meal, and conversing with a beautiful woman in the seat next to him. Dorothy, on the other hand, sitting next to her restless son, is shown in the over-crowded coach section of the plane eating from a small bag of airline peanuts intently eavesdropping on Jerry Maguire's conversation in first class. The contrast in food and drink items, along with their relative positions on the airplane, all help illustrate the contrast between the two characters in terms of social and financial status. This idea is punctuated when, at the conclusion of Jerry's story, the flight attendant abruptly closes the curtains separating first class from coach. When Dorothy's son asks her, "What's wrong, mom?" she astutely qualifies the situation by indicating, "First class is what's wrong, honey. It used to be a better meal. Now it's a better life."

While this element of Dorothy Boyd's character is more indicative of her social status rather than gender, it subtly calls attention to the lack of opportunities and covert discrimination³⁴ for many women to advance in the modern workplace despite the progress made through hard-fought legislation in recent history. Her role in the remainder of the film is as Jerry Maguire's love interest with little emphasis or screen time devoted to her working with him in helping negotiate Rod Tidwell's new contract with the Arizona Cardinals. This situation is illustrated through a montage featuring Jerry on the road supporting his client, while Dorothy appears in separate shots in the domestic setting taking care of her son and the household they

³⁴ According to the United States Equal Opportunity Commission's 2010 report EEOC's Women's Work Group Report, wide spread discrimination still exists in the modern workplace citing multiple obstacles, especially in relation to caregiving obligations. The report states "Employers may be less willing to have flexible workplace policies because of the gender-based assumption that women who have young children or may become pregnant in the future are not as dependable or as committed as their male counterparts." (http://www.eeoc.gov/federal/reports/women_workgroup_report.cfm) In addition, an August 11, 2014 article in *The Guardian* indicates that "a survey of 500 managers by law firm Slater & Gordon showed that more than 40% admitted they are generally wary of hiring a woman of childbearing age, while a similar number would be wary of hiring a woman who has already had a child or hiring a mother for a senior role." (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/science-isnt-golden/201312/women-subjects-employment-discrimination>)

share as the scene cuts back and forth between the two. The editing style of this montage calls attention to not only the physical space between the two in terms of the narrative—at this point in the film, he clearly regrets getting married to Dorothy—but it also serves a visual metaphor regarding the clear separation of gender roles in the real world of modern capitalist society through the lens of neoliberalism. Moreover, the climatic scene where Jerry professes his love to Dorothy in his dramatic “you complete me monologue” further supports the subordinate role women play in neoliberal culture when it comes to the family unit. When he tells her that, even though their business venture had a very good night, after Rod Tidwell’s outstanding performance on *Monday Night Football*, it is “not complete, nowhere near the vicinity of being complete” without her by his side as his wife. This powerful, culminating scene helps solidify Jerry Maguire’s status as *homo economicus* while Dorothy assumes the *femina domestica* role to maintain their family’s household as he navigates the world of commerce in neoliberal culture.

Subsequent post-classical Hollywood sports business films such as *The Replacements* (Howard Deutch, 2000), *Trouble with the Curve* (Robert Lorenz, 2012), *Draft Day* (Ivan Reitman, 2014), and *Million Dollar Arm* (Craig Gillespie, 2014) all feature similar female characters that exhibit the dualistic nature of being strong-willed and self-sufficient individuals whose main function in the narrative is to ultimately assist their male counterparts succeed in the world of professional athletics. In this way, Dorothy Boyd from *Jerry Maguire* is the archetypal female co-lead character type in the trend of fin de siècle post-classical Hollywood sports business films that would become a common narrative trope in subsequent sports business films.

The next chapter of this study builds on the concepts previously analyzed by exploring neoliberalism’s effects on representations relating to organized labor and modern labor practices evident in post-classical Hollywood sports business films. Initially, the next part of the study

concentrates on neoliberalism's steadfast unfavorable view regarding trade unions and organized labor in general as represented in post-classical Hollywood sports business film such as *The Replacements* (Howard Deutch, 2000). In addition, the following chapter examines the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism in the streamlining and flexibilization of the production process in *Moneyball* (Bennett Miller, 2011) as a significant generative mechanism on specific representations and thematic elements in fin de siècle post-classical Hollywood sports business films.

Chapter 4

Organized Labor and Unions in Mass Media: Thugs, Lazy Bums, and Overpaid Workers

While direct conflicts with labor unions have been and are a major part of neoliberal practices in reducing the power of organized labor in the United States, unfavorable portrayals and representations of labor unions in mass media have helped in affecting public perceptions of organized labor in popular culture. According to Victor Devinatz, “The communications media—newspapers, television, and the movies—are instrumental in shaping people’s views of labor union” (107). In *Deciding What’s News* (1979), Herbert J. Gans states, “When the news media cover labor, they don’t do so by communicating ‘neutral’ facts but by telling us stories about labor, especially stories that shape and reflect the culture’s commonsense ideas about labor, management, and capital” (43). Moreover, especially in the contemporary media landscape, news stories covering labor often present labor unions in an unfavorable manner. Bok and Dunlop assert, “Media coverage of unions is more likely to be negative biasing the public’s views of unions. For instance, the media are more likely to cover sensationalized stories of union corruption and strike violations than to cover the successful negotiation of collective bargaining between unions and employers” (qtd. in Devinatz 108). Even the ways in which unions members are featured on camera in news programs often cast unions in a negative light, which is in contrast to the visual representation of management in these same news stories. Christopher Martin adds:

The visual language of news reports is also damaging to labor’s image, studies suggest.

Television news interviews typically portray management representatives speaking directly into the camera, in the calm, rational environment of the business office.

Conversely, workers are depicted in the often chaotic, noisy environment of a street picket line and rarely interviewed face-to-face. (14)

Speaking to the bigger issues surrounding work stoppages in many news reports, Michael Parenti adds, “The problems a strike has on the economy and public inconvenience are emphasized [rather than] the cause[s] of the strike. Striking workers are thus portrayed as indifferent to the interest of the public’s well-being” (qtd. in Martin 12). Through these biased portrayals, work stoppages and strikes initiated by organized labor, union members are positioned as the antagonists in the news narratives covering such events.

As a result of this negative coverage in the news media, and the fact that many American citizens get almost all of their information regarding unions from corporate controlled mass media outlets, popular sentiment towards unions is often unsympathetic and, in some cases, openly hostile. In support of this negative perception of organized labor, the Gallup Corporation indicates, “Since 1936, support for unions has drifted slowly downward since its early peaks” (Weldon 2104). Victor Devinatz adds that “common negative perceptions of labor unions include that unions are adversarial in nature, unions are corrupt, union coerce employees to become members, unions were needed when they first formed but now are no longer necessary, and that unions members are greedy, overpaid, and lazy” (107). With the preponderance of negative press labor unions receive in American mass media, it is unsurprising that public perception of labor unions is consistently unfavorable.

Not only are these sentiments openly expressed in many news reports in the United States, unfavorable portrayals appear in other mass media text such as television and film. When labor unions are featured in television or film, they are usually represented adversely and in an unflattering manner. Steven Ross claims, “After nearly 100 years of largely negative cinematic

images and more recently in television, union characters are continually presented in film and television as sappy, dopey, or foolish, and the labor movement is often portrayed as primarily involved with gangsters, cut-throats, thieves, and bomb-throwers” (98). Peter Stead asserts that, while American films of the “1930s and 1940s possessed sympathy for the trials and tribulations of working class people, they expressed ambivalence or outright hostility towards labor union activity” (qtd. in Devinatz 109). Steven Ross adds, “When collective action was visualized, movies such as *Black Fury* (Michael Curtiz, 1935), *Riffraff* (Walter Rubin, 1935), and *Racket Busters* (Lloyd Bacon, 1938) associated strikes and unionism with corruption, violence, mobsters, and/or communism” (89). Prominent labor films of the 1950s may have presented narratives that workers deserved fair treatment in the workplace “but would not find this fairness in the corrupt-ridden unions that were portrayed in *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954), *Inside Detroit* (Fred Sears, 1956), and *The Garment Jungle* (Robert Aldrich, 1957)” (Ross 89). Peter Stead asserts, “With the return of radical politics in the 1960s and 1970s, more films were devoted to workers and working class life, although many popular films such as *Rocky* (1976), *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), and *Coal Miner’s Daughter* (1980) showed working class individuals confronting personal problems that were neither dealt with nor solved through collective action” (233). According to Steven Ross:

While there were a few pro-union films during the 1970s and 1980s such as *Norma Rae* (1979), and *Matewan* (1987), most feature films dealing with labor-capital relations—such as *Blue Collar* (1978), *F.I.S.T.* (1978), and *Hoffa* (1992)—continued to emphasize links between unions and organized crime, thereby disparaging the labor movement as a whole and the often unsympathetic but hapless dolts who did little to oppose such corruption. (90)

As previously shown, representations of organized labor associated with greed, corruption, and laziness in American cinematic history are consistently unfavorable. Consequently, popular Hollywood cinema has helped inform and affect the public's negative perception of labor unions in American society.

Neoliberalism's Battle with Labor Unions: A Brief Examination

As a macroeconomic project, neoliberalism exists as a series of legal actions intended to eliminate barriers to free trade, a set of economic practices to maximize profits through increased efficiency, and a cultural belief system emphasizing that "the individual pursuit of self-gain is understood to provide maximum benefit to the individual and society" (Miller, et al, 132). In *Sport and Consumer Culture* (2006), John Horne states, "Under neoliberalism, government policies that stem from this belief system, political philosophy, or ideology include market liberalization, restrictive monetary policies, reduction in tariff levels, removal of the welfare net, privatization of government utilities, and outsourcing" (96). During the late 1970s to the 2000s, these policies and practices gradually become part of the global economic and political landscape as neoliberalism established itself as a worldwide dominant force.

Proponents of neoliberalism refer to the concept of "flexible labor markets" as one of the necessary mechanisms in achieving maximum efficiency in free market economics. According to Gerry Rodgers, an ideal flexible labor market is defined as the "freedom for employers to adapt and respond to changes in the market unfettered by wage legislation, collective bargaining, and other non-economic constraints" (2). Jill Rubery and Damian Grimshaw enumerate on various the components of flexible labor markets that "allow employers the freedom to hire and fire, adjust job offers to new conditions, adapt working time arrangements, change employment contracts, and set wage rates based on various changes in market conditions" (138). Speaking to

the benefits flexible labor markets provide employers, Kean Birch and Vlad Mykhnenko assert, “The most common way to increase profits, under neoliberal thought, is by controlling labor costs” (4). Neoliberal advocates tout these concepts as ways to help reduce unemployment by allowing employers to reduce wages during downturns in the market and thus avoid layoffs and firings; however, flexible labor markets clearly benefit employers by allowing firms to summarily downsize, control labor costs, and increase profitability unfettered by unnecessary legislation or interference from labor unions through collective bargaining. Flexible labor market practices can leave workers vulnerable in terms of wage fluctuations and job security, both of which are determined either by market forces outside their control or management decisions to increase profits by reducing labor costs in the form of wage reductions or layoffs.

Among the most consistent forms of opposition to the implementation of these neoliberal principles in fin de siècle global capitalism, especially regarding flexible labor markets, are trade associations and labor unions. Organized labor has a long history in the United States and other industrialized nations in advocating for safer working conditions and higher salaries and wages, among many other benefits, achieved through hard-fought legislation, work stoppages, and collective bargaining agreements between management and union representatives. Despite the benefits unions helped establish for the working class, neoliberalism advocates consider labor unions an impediment to efficient business operations that interfere in maximizing profits in highly competitive global markets. Jay Coakley indicates, “The primary focus of neoliberalism as a political project is to remove all obstacles to the global flow and accumulation of capital, and that the elimination of collectives (that is unions, cooperatives, and activist communities) so that social goals do not interfere with the operation of free and open markets is one of the most important in achieving this objective” (71). Speaking to the way neoliberal philosophies qualify

labor unions, Pierre Bourdieu suggests, “Unions and other collective structures are targeted for destruction because they conflict with the ‘logic of the pure market’” (qtd. in Coakley 72). While these negative concepts regarding organized labor were important theoretical elements of neoliberal philosophy, they remained dormant until free market advocates gained political power in the Great Britain, Margaret Thatcher, and the United States, Ronald Reagan, in the latter part of the 1970s and early 1980s, respectively. These figureheads launched several aggressive, high profile attacks on powerful trade unions, many of which were successful in significantly and permanently weakening the power of organized labor in contemporary society.

At the onset of neoliberalism as a political and economic project in the United States, active campaigns to undermine the power of labor unions became standard operating procedures for many firms. This took place through numerous direct assaults on labor unions in various sectors of the United States’ economy during the early 1980s and in to the 1990s. Ronald Reagan’s attacks on organized labor during his first term as President were among the most significant in terms of efficacy in establishing neoliberal principles in action. Most notably, Reagan’s successful battle against the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) in 1981, which was instrumental in discouraging and curtailing work stoppages and strikes thereafter, was one of the most highly-publicized and effective strike-busting actions by any sitting President in American history.³⁵ In his prominent standoff with the PATCO union over higher wages, unsafe working conditions, and a crumbling air traffic infrastructure, Reagan fired nearly 13,000 professional air traffic controllers and imposed a lifetime ban on them

³⁵ While Republican politicians are portrayed as anti-union, Democrat President Jimmy Carter signed the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978, which was one of the issues that led to the PATCO strike. Ironically, during the 1980 Presidential election, the PATCO union supported Ronald Reagan who claimed that if elected, “he would act in a ‘spirit of cooperation’ and take whatever steps are necessary to provide our air traffic controllers with the most modern equipment available and to adjust staff levels and work days so that they are commensurate with achieving a maximum degree of public safety” (Cowie 363).

working for the federal government (Cowie, 362-363). Bruce Schulman indicates that, as a result of the PATCO strike, “Unions and management heard the message loud and clear. An intimidated labor movement lost influence, tamed its militancy, and moderated its demands” (234). Joshua Freeman indicates that Ronald Reagan’s handling of the PATCO strike, along with a series of other regulatory and administrative actions including “appointing a solid majority of business friendly supporters on the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)”³⁶, ruling in favor of businesses to provide obstacles for workers in unionizing, and allowing a huge backlog of complaints of labor law violations to accumulate resulting in long delays in adjudicating cases” all resulted in a dramatic decline in labor unions’ political power (377). Ultimately, Reagan’s actions against organized labor had great repercussion on unions for many years to come, both in terms of declines in union memberships and affecting public perception of organized labor in popular culture.

Another component of Ronald Reagan’s legacy in the fight against organized labor was the rise of the union avoidance industry. While union avoidance has always been a main strategy of firms and management in deterring workers forming unions throughout history, the Reagan Presidency paved the way for a dramatic rise in the number of union avoidance firms. In addition, because of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935, firms seeking to operate as union-free environments were forced to develop more sophisticated and subtle methods of union busting outside the violent and openly oppressive anti-union tactics of the past. This led to the development of an entire industry whose sole purpose is to thwart union elections in favor of

³⁶ Established by Franklyn D. Roosevelt as part of New Deal reforms in 1935, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is the United States government’s official independent agency “vested with the power to safeguard employee’s rights to organize and to determine whether to have unions as their bargaining representatives. The agency also acts to prevent and remedy unfair labor practices committed by private sector employers and unions”(https://www.nlr.gov/who-we-are).

management in creating union-free work environment across the entire private sector of the United States' economy.

According to John Logan, “By the 1970s and 1980s...the union avoidance industry had developed into a multimillion-dollar concern that profited from promoting adversarial labor-management relations, and [union avoidance] consultants had become important relations actors in their own right” (652). Among the many companies operating in this sector, management consultant firms are at the forefront of the union avoidance industry. Management consultants offer firms a wide range of union avoidance techniques that have produced a high success rate in union busting. For instance, the Burke Group, which is the largest anti-union consultancy firm, claims that it “employs over 60 full-time consultants at \$180-250 per hour working for over 1,300 clients having conducted over 800 counter-organizing campaigns since its establishment in 1981...and boasts of a 96 percent success rate” (Logan 655). John Logan continues, “The Burke Group is so confident in their ability to create a union-free environment that they offer a money back guarantee in the event that one of their clients becomes unionized (655). Based in Malibu, California, Burke Group clients include Blue Shield, Coca-Cola, K-Mart, SBC Pacific Bell, Children’s Hospital of Los Angeles, Honeywell, NBC, Mazda, General Electric, Heinz, ...MGM Grand, Lockheed Martin, Telemundo ... and the University of California-Los Angeles (Logan 655). In addition to these management consultant firms, industrial and personal psychologists,³⁷ strike management agencies, and union avoidance law firms,³⁸ all exist as parts of the intricate

³⁷ One of the most influential anti-union industrial psychologists, Dr. Charles Hughes, wrote the book *Making Unions Unnecessary*, now in its 3rd edition, has sold over 140,000 copies and is considered one of the best union avoidance manuals in the industry (Logan 662).

³⁸ One such law firm, Reed/Smith Consultants, has the following displayed on its home page, which brazenly advertises its anti-union mission: “Unions are increasing their pressure to convert union-free companies and attract new members, whether it be through conventional organizing campaigns, lobbying for union-friendly federal legislation, or, increasingly more common, using their economic weapons to force employers to agree to neutrality agreements. Unions are also actively seeking to amend the national labor laws to make it even easier for them to

and highly profitable, influential, and effective industry in preventing unionization drives from succeeding across the United States.

One consequence of the sharp rise in the union avoidance industry in the United States is a significant increase in private firms launching sophisticated, aggressive, and brazen anti-union campaigns when workers attempt to unionize. According to a 2009 study by Kate Bronfenbrenner through the Economic Policy Institute examining unfair labor practice (ULP) charge documents against regarding NLRB union elections, private firm opposition to union formation has intensified in establishing union-free work environments. According to Bronfenbrenner, “An overwhelming majority of [private sector] employers—either under the direction of an outside management consultant or their own in-house counsel—are running aggressive campaigns of threat, interrogations, surveillance, coercion, and retaliation” (9). Over the past 20 years, anti-union firms have become more aggressive and hostile in their methods characterized by “an increase in more coercive and retaliatory tactics such as threats and actual plant closings, discharges, harassments and other discipline, and alterations of benefits and conditions” (Bronfenbrenner, 14). As a result, the number of private sector workers seeking to unionize filing NLRB unfair labor practice complaints against private firms seeking union-free work environments have consistently risen over the past 20 years. Moreover, the coercive and intimidating tactics employed by these private firms have grown more sophisticated and, in some instances, marked a return to more violent means of union busting reminiscent of pre-New Deal America.

unionize a workplace. Reed Smith works with employers before unions first show up at their facilities to help create the type of working environments where employees view unions as unnecessary. If a union does begin circulating authorization cards or files a petition for election, Reed Smith helps craft a strong drive against unionization and helps employers through the representation hearing process, the election campaign, and the election itself (<https://www.reedsmith.com/Union-Avoidance-Practices/>).

Despite the great resistance to forming unions in the private sector, many workers are seeking union representation as a consistent trend starting in the 1990s and into the 21st century. Research conducted by Richard Freeman titled *Do Workers Still Want to Unionize? More Than Ever* (2007) indicates “the percent of the non-managerial workforce who say they would vote for a union has been steadily increasing from 30% in the early 1980s to almost 40% in the mid-1990s, reaching 53% in 2005” (2). However, “in 2009, the overwhelming majority of workers [in the United States] who want unions do not have them” (Bronfenbrenner 4). Peter Hart asserts after reviewing responses from an unpublished 2005 AFL-CIO Union Message Survey, Study No. 7518, “The majority of workers polled believe that, due to employer interference, they would be at great risk if they were to organize” (Bronfenbrenner 4). Despite the desire for the majority of private sector workers to unionize, as indicated by the data, the aggressive anti-union campaigns launched by private firms, often guided by union-avoidance professionals, have managed to greatly reduce the number of unionized private companies the latter part of the 20th century. According to a January 28, 2016 news release by Bureau of Labor Statistics, “The union membership rate—the percent of wage and salary workers who were members of unions—was 11.1 percent in 2015 with 14.8 million workers in unions. In 1983, the first year which comparable union data are available, the union membership rate was 20.1 percent with 17 million union workers.”³⁹ As a result of these anti-union campaigns, private sector workers are displaying greater reluctance to unionize despite their general desire to do so in a wide range of industries. Moreover, as an increasing number of private sector firms have been successful in creating union-free workplace environments, the existence of a more “flexible” labor market in the United States, as defined by neoliberalism, is being established as the norm in fin de siècle American society.

³⁹ <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf> (accessed March 31, 2016).

1970s American Labor Strikes in Early Post-Classical Hollywood Sports Business Films

At the beginning of the post-classical Hollywood sports business film trend, representations of labor disputes and unions in professional sports appeared in rudimentary form. Some of the issues in contemporaneous society relating to labor unions in the 1960s and 1970s could be seen as potential generative mechanisms in the appearance of labor disputes in American sports business films. *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings* (John Badham, 1976) is one of the first American sports business films to feature some of the issues between labor and management as part of the main narrative. This fictional film, which is based on popular, real-life players from the historic Negro League Baseball era of the 1930s, focuses on a charismatic pitcher named Bingo Long, played by Billy Dee Williams (loosely based on the real-life Negro League all-star pitcher Leroy “Satchel” Paige), who decides to steal away the best players in the league to start his own barnstorming team. By forming their own team, Bingo Long realizes that he and his teammates can keep more of the profits rather than spend the best days of their playing careers working for the meager salaries offered by the league owners, who make huge profits off their athletic talents.

As Bingo succeeds in attracting the best players from the league and his team draws larger and larger crowds to his games, he catches the ire of the Negro National League management. During an emergency meeting led by the owner of the Ebony Aces, Sallison Potter (Ted Ross), who clearly operates as a definitive corporate antagonist by the way he is presented as a cigar-chomping fat cat throughout the film, the owners contemplate the best course of action to address the threat Bingo Long’s team poses to their diminishing profits.⁴⁰ After several of the

⁴⁰ After several unsuccessful attempts to thwart Bingo Long’s team, Potter makes a deal with his nemesis in the hopes of permanently disbanding the Traveling All-Stars. Potter proposes a one game, winner-take-all contest between Bingo Long’s teams and the best from the Negro League. If Bingo wins, his team will join the league as a full member; if Potter wins, Bingo’s team disbands and all players return to their former teams. Even though Bingo

owners suggest scheduling games with the Bingo Long's team to take advantage of their popularity, Potter adamantly disagrees by declaring, "If we play them renegades, we'll have every dumb monkey in the league joining the revolution. We've got to ruin that team before they ruin us."

The fact that Potter uses the phrase "joining the revolution" to describe the actions of Bingo Long and the rest of the players looking out for their own financial futures could be viewed as a reference to the increased public awareness of conflicts between labor and management that took place in American society preceding the film's production. Derek Nystrom suggests that labor disputes initiated by African-American labor organizations, including the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and other wildcat strikes initiated in opposition to both the auto industry and the United Auto Workers union, informed the content of numerous films from the 1970s criticizing the actions of both management and established labor unions. Among the most prominent of these films was *Blue Collar* (Paul Schrader, 1978), which was loosely based on the 1972 Chevy Vega Plant Strike in Lordstown, Ohio (161).⁴¹ While it is unlikely that prominent labor disputes like the ones described above directly inspired the content and making of *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings*, the fact that other films produced soon afterwards began to feature labor disputes, including *F.I.S.T.* (Norman Jewison, 1978), *Blue Collar*, *Norma Rae* (Martin Ritt, 1979), and *Silkwood* (Mike Nichols, 1983),

Long's team wins the game and the right to join the Negro National League, it turns out to be an empty victory. This is indicated by reference to the fact that Major League Baseball has plans to break the color barrier, as indicated by one of Bingo Long's star players who is approached by a Major League scout after his team wins the final game.

⁴¹ Nystrom admits that, even though *Blue Collar* was inspired by the actions of many grassroots African-American labor organizations, specific mentioning of any of these groups was a glaring absence in this film. In response to this oversight, Nystrom indicates that, "It is hardly a surprise that a major Hollywood film would fail to engage substantively and accurately with radical political movement;" however, he indicates, "*Blue Collar* strives to depict with an unsparing realism the conditions that would lead to radical resistance" (161-162).

indicates that Hollywood began to take notice of the extant labor movement in the United States and incorporated themes related to organized labor into the films' narratives.

These labor-dispute films all featured prominent corporate antagonists along with filmic villains representing certain corrupt labor unions. As a result, the embodiment of corporate antagonists representative of management and ownership through labor disputes in popular American films in general can be seen as a potential generative mechanism in providing narrative inspiration for the appearance of similar characterizations of management battling their work forces in post-classical Hollywood sports films such as *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings*.

***The Replacements* (2000): The NFL and MLB Players Strikes and Greedy Overpaid Athletes in Popular Cinema**

Based on the 1987 NFL players strike, Howard Deutch's *The Replacements* (2000) serves as a remarkable site of analysis in Hollywood's continuation of portraying labor unions in an unfavorable manner. While qualified as a poorly executed, cliché-ridden regurgitation of worn out sports film conventions by many film critics,⁴² many of these same critics explain the ways in which the film delivers representations of organized labor in American professional team sports. Elvis Mitchell of *The New York Times* wrote, "*The Replacements* is a desperate, broad comedy, full of fist fights, gunplay, projective vomiting and might as well come with a bouncing ball so members of the audience can recite the dialogue along with the actors." However, regarding the film's portrayal of issues pertaining to the players' strike, "The film's lack of

⁴² In contrast to the original criticism, more recent reviews of *The Replacements* are more favorable, with Jeffery Lyles stating in his 2015 review, "There isn't a football cliché *The Replacements* doesn't tackle, but its all-star cast, sharp writing, and easy-going approach makes it one of the more enjoyable sports comedies in the last two decades." (<http://lylesmoviefiles.com/2015/09/25/the-replacements-review-football-comedy-scores/>). In addition, the film has received a great deal of air time on cable television through multiple re-runs on the TBS network of stations, and is listed on the NFL's official website as on its the "Best Football Movies of All Time" list. (<http://www.nfl.com/photoessays/09000d5d82952ed3>).

comment on the politics of the strike, which resulted in the real-life players lost their job action, cheapens all this by treating the pros as spoiled princesses.” Roger Ebert offers a similar contrast in claiming, “*The Replacements* is slap-happy entertainment painted in broad strokes, and is a standard sports movie, but with every point made twice or three times—as if we’d never seen one before.” Yet Ebert continues, “The movie’s approach to labor unions is casual at best, where the regular players are the bad guys, which is the standard way the media handles such situations is to consider striking players as overpaid and selfish.” Joe Leydon from *Variety* indicates, “This film based on the true-life misadventures of replacement players employed during the 1987 NFL strike, which depicts strikers as spoiled greed heads and replacement players as blue-collar heroes should please many audiences.” All these film reviews point out the fact that *The Replacements* offers a one-sided view of organized labor by positioning millionaire football players on strike as the bad guys and completely elides owners’ untenable stance towards profit sharing in the negotiations among other points of contention leading up to the strike.

While *The Replacements* is based on the 1987 NFL strike, it also draws elements from the way mass media covered the 1995 Major League Baseball strike, the latter of which resulted in a tremendous backlash of unpopular sentiment towards MLB baseball.⁴³ Christopher Martin claims, “Television and newspaper reports chronically framed the strike as a battle between two equally cynical and dishonest parties...that rarely sorted through the complicated history of labor relations in the MLB” (126). Martin continues, “The narrative of union-owner conflict was one of the most common stories of the baseball strike that commonly cast it as ‘millionaires vs. billionaires,’ the framing of which seemed ridiculous from the onset—in the commonsense view

⁴³ According to ESPN’s 2004 article “The 1994 Strike was a Low Point for Baseball” the strike affected public sentiment with the fans whereby “attendance plunged 20 percent the following year, from a record average of 31,612 in 1994 to 25,260. Only this season [2004], when crowds are averaging 30,513, has attendance approached its pre-strike level.” <http://espn.go.com/mlb/news/story?id=1856626>. (Accessed April 15, 2016).

of news—that such wealthy players and owners could have any legitimate grievances” (129-130). W. Lance Bennett and Murray Edelman note, “Narrative frames of news typically specify ‘heroes and villains’ and ‘deserving and underserving people’” (159). In the ongoing covering the 1994-1995 MLB strike, news outlets deliberately crafted their programs and packages to help establish and perpetuate this narrative of players and owners as the villains, while simultaneously positioning the fans as the real victims and even as the heroes in this dispute.

Even though fans decried both the striking players and owners, the players bore the brunt of public scorn. Many news reports told the story of the forsaken fan, which featured interviews from fans voicing their frustrations directed at the players. Christopher Martin indicates that many news packages “used fan sound bites and included the image and unquestioned logic of fans—often little boys—to dramatize the harm inflicted by striking players” (132-133). For instance, when asked about the strike an ABC report featured a young boy stating, “I’ve heard they make more money than the President”, while a CBS report featured another young boy stating, “I think it stinks. I mean, they’re already making enough money” (Martin 133). Multiple news programs repeated similar statements from angry fans, which almost exclusively featured fans directing their contempt towards the greedy players while almost completely ignoring the owners’ role in the contentious labor dispute.

The Replacements features a similar television interview with a fan coded as being representative of the working class by his dress and speech patterns. In the film, the interview is shown on a television in a working class bar, where the fan provides his opinion when asked about the replacement players, “These guys are like us. This strike ain’t about guys like me. It’s about them hotshot superstars who want to make \$8 million instead of \$7. You know what I say, I say to hell with them. This is the most fun I’ve had in football in years.” This idea of

portraying the fan as victims due to the greed of the striking players is reinforced by the fact that two working class men are shown watching the news report on a TV in a neighborhood bar echoing the sentiments of the fan in the TV interview. This brief scene helps augment the negative sentiments directed towards the striking players in *The Replacements*, which further casts the greedy full-time players as the film's antagonists. In addition, it serves as a filmic representation of the ways in which popular news outlets covered the actual football and baseball strikes in a similar manner and tone.

In its unfavorable portrayal of organized labor, one of the first narrative elements *The Replacements* establishes early in the film is the perception of overpaid, greedy athletes personified through the striking football players. This concept is explored through various scenes featuring the striking football players and representatives of the players union providing exposition regarding the reasons for the strike. The first instance of this occurs during the opening credits when the player's association representative is being interviewed on a news program during a broadcast of the final game before the strike begins. The union representative tells the news crew, "I am sad that the players' demands, which center around a rise in the current salary cap, have been rejected by the owners. I have told my union brothers to walk." This particular mentioning of the rise in the salary cap is more of a reference to the actual circumstance surrounding the 1995 Major League Baseball strike, which was the main point of contention from the players' perspective. According to Christopher Martin:

Another significant yet often neglected point of news coverage regarding the 1994-1995 Major League Baseball strike was that the players' union was not striking for more money but instead to prevent the owners from unilaterally imposing a salary cap, which would take players out of a competitive bidding process through owner collusion to limit

team payrolls. Players' salaries would then be limited, but—as usual—there would be no limit to the owners' potential profits. (137)

Even though *The Replacements* mentions this element of the strike, it does so in cursory fashion and never touches on the topic of owners exploiting the players by imposing this salary cap that ultimately allows the owners to underpay their talent while reaping record profits.

Immediately following the news report of the players' union representative, another television interview, this time with the all-star quarterback for the mythical Washington Sentinels, Eddie Martel (Brett Cullen), explain his reasons for agreeing to the strike. In a post game interview, the announcer asks, "Eddie, a lot of angry fans out there feel that the players are being too greedy with their demands. Any comments?" Martel responds calmly, "I know that \$5 million a year sounds like a lot of money, but I have to pay 10% to my agent, 5% to my lawyer, I have child support and alimony..." Another player interrupts the interview by interjecting, "Do you know what the insurance costs on a Ferrari, mother fucker?" When the scene cuts back to John Madden and Pat Summerall—both playing themselves as popular football announcers—they state, "It's all about the money, but isn't it always?" This opening segment provides not only a great deal of exposition setting up the plot of the rest of the film, it also definitively casts the striking players associated with the union as greedy and out-of-touch with the everyday fan. In addition, the fact that Martel mentions he has to pay child support and alimony is a subtle disparagement of his personal character in being an absent father to multiple women, which is yet another unfavorable stereotype applied to high-profile, wealthy professional athletes in American popular culture.

The next scene features the owner, Edward O'Neil (Jack Warden) recruiting Jimmy McGinty (Gene Hackman), a former head coach of the Washington Sentinels who was fired by

O'Neil years earlier, as the new football coach to head the team of replacement players. At first, McGinty is reluctant to accept the job, indicating, "You don't have any players. They all flew home to their castles in their private jets." O'Neil reminds him of the scenario that got him fired in the first place stating, "You went head to head with an \$8 million dollar quarterback, who the Hell did you think was going to win? But that won't happen here. I'm talking about a team of poor nobodies who play to win. Not a bunch of bitchy millionaires." This scene further reinforces the perception of the striking players as greedy millionaires and sets them up clearly as the film's antagonists. The fact that the "bitchy millionaire" comment referring to the striking players comes from a "bitchy billionaire" is never explored in *The Replacements*. Even though O'Neil later betrays McGinty by allowing Eddie Martel to return to the team, the owner is usually portrayed in a favorable light as an old rich guy just trying to make the best of the situation created by the greedy players in forcing the strike. In addition, since he is the one to bring in the replacement players to finish out the season further reinforces his good-natured perception in giving these "poor nobodies," most of which are representative of the working-class—the occupations of the replacement players include a police officer, factory workers, a convenient store clerk, and small business owners—a second chance to live out their athletic dreams as professional athletes.

In the world of professional American sports, one popular perception of athletes is that they are adequately compensated for their efforts and, in many cases, overpaid. Portrayals of wealthy and often greedy athletes appear in news reports, television programs, and Hollywood films help perpetuate this overly simplified narrative in popular culture. Bombarded by this idea through mass media, the average citizen may take it as a given that professional athletes have long-term financial security, which elevates them to appear as part of the privileged elite in the

United States. While some retired athletes have been successful in this regard, especially high-profile figures such as Magic Johnson, Wayne Gretzky etc., the vast majority of rank-and-file professional athletes are not as fortunate. Willie Osterweil calls attention to this one-sided perception indicating, “Given the fact that big league athletes not at the top of their game get five, maybe 10 years of pay, after which they often find themselves unskilled, jobless and saddled with the debts and expenses that can come from having had an incredibly high income and then suddenly losing it, along with suffering lifelong physical or mental injuries.” Tyler Hartnett of *The Huffington Post* adds, “a *Sports Illustrated* study showed that after only two years of retirement, 78 percent of NFL players were either broke or struggling financially, and within five years of retirement, 60 percent of NBA players are broke.”⁴⁴ Even though this is the reality for many former professional athletes across all team sports in the United States, the idea of the ungrateful, overpaid, and irresponsible athlete remains an enduring perception in mainstream popular culture.

Certain sports information outlets have devoted more sympathetic stories and reports as to the genuine financial states of most former professional athletes that are helping to dispel this stereotype. For instance, ESPN’s 2014 *30 for 30: Broke* vividly illustrates the disturbing breadth of real life professional athletes who made terrible business investments during their playing careers and who are struggling financially at the end of their playing careers. Regardless, representations of greedy and/or reckless professional athletes still appear with great frequency in mass media, and especially in certain post-classical Hollywood sports business films.

Statistically, the career spans of most professional athletes are relatively short; however, the average NFL player has one of the shortest careers of all the major American professional

⁴⁴ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tyson-hartnett/why-athletes-go-broke-and_b_6812864.html (accessed March 5, 2016).

team sports. According to *Statistica.com*, the average career of an NFL player is 3.3 years. In response as a counter to these statistics, the NFL conducted its own study indicating this figure is closer to 6.0 years⁴⁵. Dashiell Bennett from *The Business Insider* calls into question the NFL's "inflated" numbers, asserting, "The *average* length of a career in the league may be six years... but only if you don't count anyone who is *below average*...and for those who play for less money (while giving up the chance for steady income at another job) and without the same level of insurance or retirement benefits as the top tier players."⁴⁶ For the vast majority of NFL players, long-lived high earnings, job security, and retirement benefits are difficult to attain, which often leaves these broken figures living in chronic pain and dealing with permanent brain damage, in some case, with few skills outside their innate athletic talents to fend for themselves in the competitive free market system at the completion of their brief playing career. These facts are never mentioned in *The Replacements*, and the film simplistically portrays the striking athletes in this one-dimensional manner, focusing on the stereotype of greedy, overpaid athletes as the qualities ascribed to the film's antagonists embodied by the ungrateful and out-of-touch regular football players associated with the trade union.

Scabs Strike Back: Owners Pitting Workers Against Each Other in *The Replacements*

The Replacements is clear in its narrative structure in establishing that the main conflict in the film is between the noble replacement players and the greedy regular players on strike. However, the more complicated issue in reality *The Replacements* fails to address the bigger issue that ownership often turns workers against each other by brining in replacements or scabs to weaken organized labor's bargaining position in the long run. *The Replacements* features

⁴⁵ <http://blogs.nfl.com/2011/09/15/nfl-study-finds-686-year-average-career-for-players/> (accessed February 25, 2016).

⁴⁶ <http://www.businessinsider.com/nfls-spin-average-career-length-2011-4> (accessed February 23, 2016).

multiple battles between the scabs and the regular players, all of which cast the striking full-time players as the villains.

The first illustration of this conflict occurs when the replacements arrive at the stadium on their first day of practice. The union representative, surrounded by Eddie Martel and a group of other striking players in the parking lot, speaks to a reporter about the latest developments in the strike stating, “What the owners are doing is absolutely unconscionable. They’ve blatantly gone out and hired scabs, which goes against our Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Emancipation Proclamation.” As the bus arrives with the replacement players, the players demonstrating outside carrying picket signs, become irate, throwing eggs at the bus and physically rocking the bus back and forth in a violent manner. When the replacements step off the bus, the police have to restrain the striking players who are shouting multiple insults at the replacements as they walk towards the locker room. The replacement players fight back, returning the insults to the regular players, which ends in one of the replacements throwing an empty beer can at the striking players shouting, “Get a job, you wankers.” This causes the regular players to charge at the replacements, who are saved by the police shutting out the regular players behind a large iron gate.

While the physical action of this scene is important in setting up the conflict between the replacements and striking players, the manner in which each side is dressed also provides fitting contrast through the *mise-en-scene* in positioning each side as the heroes and villains, respectively. The striking players are shown wearing expensive clothing, ostentatious hats, and ornate jewelry stereotypical of the greedy, overpaid athlete. Conversely, all the replacement players are dressed in modest clothing such as jeans, T-shirts, and conventional jackets typical of working class people. The physical difference between Eddie Martel and his replacement rival,

Shane Falco (Keanu Reeves), is further illustrated later in this same scene when Shane arrives in his worn out pick-up truck. When Martel comes face-to-face with Falco, Martel is shown wearing an expensive grey suit with his hair slicked back and a sole patch below his lower lip. Falco, on the other hand, is dressed in jeans, a long sleeve t-shirt covered by a brown suede jacket, and a baseball cap. In addition, when Martel confronts Falco, he walks past his immaculately maintained Porsche 911 sports car to meet Shane in front of his beat up truck. Both the contrast in dress and cars in this scene helps illustrate the conflict between the two factions of players, which is punctuated by the striking players turning Shane's truck on its side and later painting the word "SCAB" on the roof in red paint.

The next direct conflict between the scabs and the regular players takes place in a local bar after the replacements lost their first game. The scene begins with the dejected team pictured throughout the bar getting drunk and discussing the circumstances leading to their defeat. Led by Eddie Martell, the striking players enter the bar taunting the replacement players for their lackluster performance on the field of play. Again, the contrast in dress between the regular players and the replacements is similar to the first time they meet outside the stadium on the first day of practice, which helps position the two groups of players as opposing forces in direct conflict with each other. After Martel insults one of the players, a talented but deaf tight end by the name Brian Murphy (David Denman), Shane Falco intercedes to defend his teammate. Once he does, a wild melee breaks out in the bar between the striking players and the replacements, which is a narrative trope evident in many other Hollywood sports films, especially ones involving American football. While the bar fight is clichéd, it also features serves as a vicarious outlet for audiences to visualize their frustrations towards the greedy striking athletes as the

replacements get the best of them during the bar fight. Michael O'Sullivan's review of *The Replacements* in *The Washington Post* comments directly on this element stating:

The film attempts to tap into our not-so-secret resentment of corporate sport greed heads and the overpriced divas on steroids with which we have a love/hate relationship. [With the bar fight] we are treated to a perversely satisfying scene in which Shane [Falco] and company beat the living crud out of their off-field tormentors, the spoiled whiners they're replacing led by the smirking Eddie Martel (Brett Cullen). (August 11, 2000)

Another scene of violence directed towards the striking players occurs on the morning after the bar fight, when Martel and his colleagues once again turn Shane's truck on its side. This time, Shane Falco's guards on the field, Jamal Abdul Jackson (Fazion Love) and his brother Andre "Action" Jackson (Michael Taliferro), step in to defend Shane. When the striking players refuse to set Shane's truck back on its wheels, Jamal takes out a handgun and shoots out the windows of Martel's Porsche 911. More scenes of physical harm delivered to the striking players take place during the last game, where the replacements take cheap shots at the Dallas players, all of whom crossed the picket line to beat up on the Sentinels. In addition, since Martel also crossed the picket line and is deliberately throwing the game, when Shane returns to take his place in the second half, the replacements take great pleasure in physically beating up Martel and throwing him out of the locker room. The inclusion of these scenes depicting physical violence towards the striking players not only helps augment the narrative tension between the two warring groups of players, but it also provides audiences with multiple sites of visual pleasure in witnessing the striking players being punished for their greediness and disregard for the well-being of the fans.

While *The Replacements* does not have a non-athlete sports protagonist—albeit the head coach, Jimmy McGinty could be seen as a NASP at least in a supporting role—this film still qualifies as important example in the evolution of the Hollywood sports business film trend affected by the spread of neoliberalism in fin de siècle global capitalism. Again, even though critics describe this film as a lowbrow comedy riddled with worn-out sports film clichés and bits of filmic action, its emphasis on organized labor and exploration of the various American professional team sports work stoppages and strikes in the latter part of the 20th century situate *The Replacements* as important milestone in the category of post-classical Hollywood sports business films.

Post-Fordism: A Generative Mechanism in Post-Classical Sports Business Films

In positioning post-Fordism in neoliberal capitalist society as a potential generative mechanism in American popular cinema, a brief overview comparing post-Fordism with its predecessor, Fordism, is a helpful starting point. While Fordism has been part of American industrial practices since in the early 1900s, the “Golden Era” of controlled capitalism, 1945-1975, is of particular interest for the purposes of this study in examining the differences between Fordism in conjunction with American Keynesianism and post-Fordism with global neoliberalism from the late 1970s to the 21st century. This comparison will help clarify how the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism served as a generative mechanism in the appearance of certain representations and narrative elements in post-Classical Hollywood cinema in general and sports business film from the late 1970s to the 21st century.

The Fordist/Keynesian Golden Era coupling was implemented as a new model of capitalism to help revive the American economy from the devastating effects of the Great Depression. Ronaldo Munck asserts that this new model of capitalism involved a necessary

“tempering of free-market forces with state intervention” in order to spur economic recovery and gain some level of stability (25). Munck further states:

This new model of capitalism [also] created a new mode of regulation, which included Fordist production methods, a tolerance of state enterprises, the development of a state-sponsored welfare state, and the goal of full employment through a social compromise between capital and wage labor that [replaced] the free-for-all laissez-faire economic dogma towards labor before the crash of the 1930s. (24-26)

As a result, this Keynesian/Fordism macroeconomic plan was effective in stabilizing the American economy after the Great Depression, bolstering it during World War II, and allowing it to flourish for one of the longest periods of time in U.S. history from the 1950s to the mid 1970s.

One of the most important elements of the new capitalism model associated with Fordism was an emphasis on mass production and economies of scale conducted by large-scale firms using single product flow methods. According to Michael Piore and Charles Sabel, in most industrialized countries both during and after World War II, “all sectors of manufacturing and corporations were based on mass production” (6). Michael Best adds, “Mass production, along with other factors such as the principle of flow, scientific management, and single-product flow systems, became guiding principles for designing production facilities in America” (51). By employing Fordist assembly line methods in American industrial practices, a network of competing companies were able to generate a steady flow of work resulting in a significant drop in unemployment. Moreover, firms generating a limited number of specialized products in great quantities through mass production not only helped achieve high levels of employment in the United States, but also helped open new domestic and worldwide consumption markets.

In addition to the importance of efficient, large scale mass production, mass consumption, based on paying workers a high enough wage to be able to afford the products they are mass producing, was another crucial element of the Keynesian/Fordism macroeconomic model in establishing a stable and prosperous American economy. According to Ronaldo Munck, “From its inception, Fordism was a form of capitalist production but also a mode of consumption based on the concept of ‘regimes of accumulation’” (32). According to Bob Jessop’s Internet article *Fordism and Post-Fordism: a Critical Reformulation*, accumulation regimes under Fordism are crucial in that it is “a macro-economic regime sustaining expanded reproduction, which involves a virtuous circle of growth based on mass production and mass consumption”⁴⁷ (Jessop par. 5). Regarding paying workers higher wages as beneficial for both consumers and producers, Munck points out, “Ford introduced a daily wage (measured wage) to replace piece rates [a common practice under Taylorism], along with the Five Dollar Day, to attract workers to his car plants” (31). Even Antonio Gramsci, a harsh critic of capitalism and Ford himself, provides Ford with minor appreciation in this regard through the following criticism, stating “Fordism is eminently rational, with a trade-off between higher wages and the associated rise in living standards on one hand, and a new labor process demanding an unprecedented expenditure of muscular and nervous energy and the deskilling of workers on the other” (312). This regime of accumulation, based on stable mass production and mass consumption, was an important cornerstone to the overall success of Keynesian/Fordism during the 1950s to the mid 1970s in the United States. As a result, these concepts remained axiomatic until the occurrence of various

⁴⁷ Bob Jessop further asserts, “Many studies assume that the Fordist regime and its reproduction are autocentric, i.e., that the circuit of capital is primarily confined in national boundaries. On these assumptions Fordism’s virtuous circle involves: rising productivity based on economies of scale in mass production, rising incomes linked to productivity, increased mass demand due to rising wages, increased profits based on full utilization of capacity, increased investment in improved mass production equipment and techniques, and a further rise in productivity” (http://bobjessop.org/2013/11/05/fordism-and-post-fordism-a-critical-reformulation/#_edn33, par. 5).

economic, political, and social crises from the 1960s to the 1980s allowed for post-Fordism and neoliberalism to supplant Keynesian/Fordism as guiding forces in fin de siècle global capitalism operations and practices.

Many events led to the decline of Fordism/Keynesian in the latter part of the 20th century. According to Ronaldo Munck, “The end of the Golden Age in the 1970s was marked by momentous events such as the collapse of Bretton Woods system of international finance (i.e., the Gold Standard), massive increase in oil prices brought on by OPEC, the rise of Reaganism-Thatcherism with their neoliberal economic policies of the 1980s, and the collapse of state socialism at the end of that decade” (45). One of the first and most significant developments that precipitated the decline of Fordism in the United States was due to ability of Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) in Western Europe and Japan to compete with America through more efficient and flexible production methods. In addition, the gradual expansion of the global marketplace regarding both production and consumption eroded at America’s seemingly indomitable position as the world’s number one exporter of goods and services. Accordingly, neoliberalism’s increased emphasis on global markets rather than primarily isolated national economies and the subsequent rise in globalization were among the crucial developments that added pressure in accelerating the shift from Fordism to Post-Fordism in the late 20th century.

As neoliberal policies were introduced and globalization accelerated in the latter part of the 20th century, the long-standing practices of American industry relying on mass production of a limited number of products in bulk proved outmoded compared with other countries in emerging markets producing a wider range of products intended for smaller, niche markets. Coupled with burgeoning advancements in computer and information technologies, changes in fin de siècle manufacturing processes with an emphasis on a new imagination of flexibility in all

aspects of production, management, and labor helped accelerate the advancement of post-Fordism. Along with increased flexibility in labor practices, which often resulted in a drastic decline in worker's wages, the concept of flexible specialization in the production process was a major sub-component surrounding the re-imagination of industrial flexibility in Post-Fordist neoliberal society.

While the concept of “flexibility” is key to both Fordism and Post-Fordism, several crucial differences must be explored, especially regarding the concept of flexible specialization in relation to post-Fordist manufacturing strategies. Michael Piore and Charles Sabel assert, “Flexible specialization is a strategy of permanent innovations: accommodation to ceaseless change rather than an effort to control it” (17). Meine Pieter Van Dijk adds, “The use of new technology and the way firms use their technology and skilled labor are key elements regarding proper implementation of flexible specialization” (19). This concept of constant innovation refers not only to the Fordist practice of using machines with interchangeable parts to quickly shift production lines on mass produced products and operating under the most efficient production practices, but also the ability of firms to adapt to changes in the market to meet numerous small scale demands through a shift from mass production to niche production.

Subesh Das and P. Panayiotopoulos claim that flexible specialization helps “explain why the industrial economies dominated by Fordist methods of mass production (like US, France and Britain) were in decline, while countries like Japan, West Germany, and Italy, which adopted more flexible production methods were flourishing during the early stages of neoliberalism” (L-77). According to Jill Rubery and Damian Grimshaw, important milestones in the latter stages of the post-war era in post-Fordist production models that proved more effective than the traditional Fordist production regimes were Japan's lean production model, West Germany's diversified

quality production, Italy's flexible specialization, and Sweden's socio-technical systems of production model (58-70).⁴⁸ While this was only part of the picture, flexible specialization strategies were instrumental in accelerating the ability of Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) to outpace their American counterparts at the onset of neoliberalism as post-Fordism became a more dominant force in global capitalism.

According to Meine Pieter van Dijk, "In the case of flexible specialization two versions can be distinguished: the so-called large scale and the small scale variant. In the small-scale variant, flexible specialization results from the clustering of small firms and a strong inter-firm division of labor. The large firm variant exists when large firms decentralize and specialize internally or use specialized suppliers (the Japanese subcontracting model)" (16). Ronaldo Munck adds that another key component of "flexible specialization requires co-ordination and co-operation between economic actors, and that a high degree of individual and social trust among the various social actors—in labor and management as well as between separate firms—is necessary in sustaining the complex systems of production which the new capitalist economy is creating" (61). Through this spirit of cooperation characterized by "the combination of some competition with some collaboration, taking advantage of subcontracting relations, and creating clusters and networks, the willingness of Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) in Europe and Japan to make these adaptations added to their ability to eventually surpass the United States in terms of production and distribution in the fin de siècle Post-Fordist global marketplace.

It is important to note that the shift from Fordism to Post-Fordism in American society involves a much more complex range of factors than presented in the preceding interpretation of

⁴⁸ Rubery and Grimshaw suggest, "The four alternative models were developed according to a blueprint as to how a country should meet the challenges of post-Fordism. Each of these four models emerged from historical processes related to wider political forces and power relations in the particular societies. These have included the relationship between state and industry in the context for war preparations, links between the local state and small business communities, and the orientation of trade union movements in the countries concerned" (70).

the process covers. Exploring the legislative, political, and relaxation of international trade/tariff control elements among many others relating to the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism are outside the scope of this analysis on post-classical Hollywood sports business films. However, the main elements specifically featured in this study regarding the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism in the wake of neoliberalism and globalization are positioned as generative mechanisms in the appearance of certain narrative elements and representations in post-classical Hollywood cinema. Ronnie Lipschutz contends, “Movies and novels as cultural products, in their composition, can tell us a great deal about the economy and society in which they have been produced” (7). Therefore, the ensuing analysis of the economics and politics as generative mechanisms in the representations in post-Hollywood cinema and American sports business helps provide insight regarding their cultural and sociological significance.

From Gung Ho! (1943) to Gung Ho (1986): Fordism to Post-Fordism Shift in American Cinema

As the production processes of the studio system gave way to new methods of production during the New Hollywood movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism also began to take place in the American film industry. Not only did this transition affect the way certain new films were conceived, produced, and marketed, but it also resulted in the appearance of new themes and narrative elements reflective of this overall change in society. Among its many distinctions, New Hollywood cinema marked the creation of revisionist takes on traditional Hollywood genres. Within this revisionist trend, Thomas Elsaesser points to “massive differences between classical Hollywood’s central protagonist with a cause, a goal, a purpose—in short, a motivation for action, and the ‘unmotivated hero’ coupled with a ‘pathos of failure’ tone of the narrative with films such as *Easy Rider* (1969)” (335). As a

result of these experimentations and re-workings of traditional generic elements, a contrast in style and themes emerged between New Hollywood Cinema and classical Hollywood of the 1940s to the 1960s.

The combat film, which saw a popular resurgence during the late 1960s and early 1970s, was a Hollywood genre that exhibited representations of the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism in various thematic and narrative elements in certain films during this revisionist period. According to Drehli Robnik, *The Dirty Dozen* (Robert Aldrich, 1967), *M*A*S*H* (Robert Altman, 1970), and *Kelly's Heroes* (Brian Hutton, 1970) reworked the combat film genre as allegories of post-Fordism through narrative action and thematic development (Elsaesser et al 333-334). Regarding his analysis of New Hollywood combat films, Robnik first contrasts the classical Hollywood combat film *Gung Ho!* (Ray Enright, 1943) with *The Dirty Dozen* (Robert Aldrich, 1967), and *Kelly's Heroes* (Brian Hutton, 1970). *Gung Ho!* is particularly important in that it is considered the model for the late 1960s "dirty group" war movies, which bring together disparate groups of soldiers to carry out small-scale, efficient incursions against the enemy (Basinger 203; Doherty 296). However, Robnik contends, "By positioning a continuous link and family resemblance between *Gung Ho!* and New Hollywood's combat movies, the authors [Basinger and Doherty] overlook important differences in the films' respective conceptions of innovative teamwork and combat efficiency" (Elsaesser et al 343-344). On one hand, "*Gung Ho!*'s harmonious working machine adheres to a logic of duty-based teamwork and thus amounts to a mere intensification of Fordist/Taylorist discipline" (Elsaesser et al 344). Conversely, this "Fordist functionalism is absent from *The Dirty Dozen* and *Kelly's Heroes*, and these films depend not on fusing differences or reducing them to standards of efficiency, but on mining them for their use-values as potential productive sources; they are not about making misfits fit, but

about misfits refitting and retooling the machinery” (Elsaesser et al 345). These narrative and thematic elements of flexibility in developing and implementing more efficient, non-traditional methods to fight wars are emblematic of the contrast between the classical Hollywood combat films and their New Hollywood counterparts.

Both *The Dirty Dozen* and *Kelly’s Heroes* exhibit post-Fordist qualities of flexibility and adaptation to new combat tactics focusing on small scale attacks on the enemy that stand outside the traditional Fordist-inspired methods of military operation of the past. According to Robnik, “The production context [of preparing for war] reflected in *The Dirty Dozen* and *Kelly’s Heroes* is representative of the post-Fordization of American filmmaking—Hollywood’s shift from the studio-based mass production of films to marketing fewer, more specialized films made independently with transitory labor arrangements targeted for numerous niche audiences” (Elsaesser et al 346). Moreover, the shift to post-Fordism in the Hollywood production process, coupled with pressures exerted by the counter culture of the 1960s-1970s, also helped serve as a generative mechanism in the appearance of new representations of this type of flexibility in narrative and thematic elements in films from New Hollywood and beyond. While Robnik speaks directly to the post-Fordist qualities of New Hollywood combat films, his theoretical perspective can be applied to analyzing American sports films produced both during the late 1960s to the early 1970s and into the post-classical era exhibiting post-Fordist narratives.

Bridging the gap between combat and sports films, *M*A*S*H* (Robert Altman, 1970) exhibits the post-Fordist sensibilities pertaining to not only the operations of a non-traditional mobile army hospital unit during the Korean War, but also through a football game between a rival Army unit. Pauline Kael in her analysis of the film suggests:

The soldier protagonists' adolescent pride in skills and games—in mixing a martini or devising a fishing lure or in golfing, would be written off as meaningless in classical narrative films, while *M*A*S*H* offers a new pragmatic orientation in that people who are loose or profane can function and do something useful in what may appear to be insane circumstances. (Kael 94)

Sight and Sound's review of *M*A*S*H* also hinted at the very usefulness of integrating humor and profanity into the military labor process and illustrates the value of flexibilization suggesting, "If there is one moral that can be drawn from the succession of gags and incidents which provide the film's sprawling narrative structure is that inflexible attitudes to war (chauvinistic, religious, bureaucratic, or heroic) lead straight to the strait-jacket" (Dawson 161). Throughout the film, the doctors, nurses, and enlisted men employ unconventional, post-Fordist tactics to excel at their work under horrific circumstance with limited resources while enduring the drudgeries of war by indulging in equally ingenious playful activities reminiscent of their civilian lives.

This same level of post-Fordist flexibility paired with a sense of light-heartedness and willingness to operate outside the norm is vividly exhibited in the climatic football game between the 4077th MASH unit and its rival, the 325th Evac Hospital. The main element of the football game in *M*A*S*H* relating to the contrast between Fordist and post-Fordist production methods is epitomized by the differences between the two Army units. First of all, the 325th Evac Hospital represents the standard army combat medical unit in the United States Army, which functions through traditional Fordist methods of conduct and operation with a large staff with plentiful resources. On the other hand, the MASH 4077th is representative of a new type of military-medical enterprise developed in the aftermath of World War II that is forced to operate

with fewer resources and a much smaller workforce. Furthermore, when the topic of playing a game of “friendly football” between the two units arises with a \$6,000 bet on the outcome, the doctors at the 4077th clearly understand their disadvantage in terms of manpower, organization, and experience in winning the football game. Knowing full well that they stand no chance of competing with the 325th’s football team in building their team in the traditional manner, they use flexible and unconventional means of preparation and execution of the football game to their advantage. The first action they take in this regard is to have an all-star professional football player from the San Francisco 49ers, who happens to be a talented neurosurgeon by the name of Oliver Harmon Jones, surreptitiously assigned to their unit. With their “ringer” in place, the MASH football team employs other dirty tricks to ensure their victory, which includes injuring as many of the opposing team’s players and even drugging the other team’s best player on the field after he scores a touchdown. Finally, the only way the 4077th team defeat the 325th is by using a gimmick, unconventional play, which earns them the victory at the last seconds in chaotic fashion.

The contrast between the football teams of the 325th and the 4077th in *M*A*S*H* help illustrate the effectiveness of defeating a superior opponent through unconventional, innovative, and flexible modes of operation and conduct. In addition, it serves as a cinematic allegory to the benefits of post-Fordist flexible operations over Fordism and traditional forms of production in contemporary capitalism as neoliberalism spread across the world. Post-classical Hollywood sports films produced after *M*A*S*H* such as *The Longest Yard* (Robert Aldrich, 1974), *The Bad News Bears* (Michael Ritchie, 1976), *Wildcats* (Michael Ritchie, 1986), *The Mighty Ducks* (Stephen Herek, 1992), *The Replacements* (Howard Deutch, 2000) and *Hardball* (Brian Robbins, 2001) all feature similar unconventional methods of putting together sports teams to compete

with superior opponents, which can be viewed as representative of the contrast between Fordism and post-Fordism. As a result, themes of post-Fordist modes of operation frequently appear in post-classical Hollywood sports films through narrative actions both crucial to and in support of each film's main plot.

Even Ron Howard's critically decried *Gung Ho* (1986), which exists as a direct representation of the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism through the main narrative featuring a fictional Japanese company buying a defunct American auto plant, uses sports to reinforce this contrast through a softball game between the American workers and the Japanese managers. The contrast between the two is first illustrated visually through the mise-en-scene when both teams are shown preparing for the game. The American players are dressed in mismatching outfits ranging from shorts and tank tops to jeans and oversized T-shirts warming up for the game drinking beer and casually playing catch. The Japanese players arrive wearing well-tailored, pinstriped professional baseball uniforms with the company's logo stitched across the chest with matching hats. The Japanese players perform a series of coordinated calisthenics, which draws the attention of the American softball players who mock the Japanese players for their pre-game rituals. Once the game begins, the Japanese players execute a series of bunts to load the bases, which catches the American players by surprise who are expecting them to hit the ball as hard they can to get a hit. When the American third baseman moves in closer to field the bunts, the clean up Japanese hitter clears the bases with a hard-hit triple to the outfield. As the teams battle against each other, both utilizing their own strengths and strategies, the final outcome of the game is decided by one of the American players deliberately running into the Japanese short stop preventing him from making the final out to seal the victory for his team. While this bit of filmic narrative action is intended to show the frustrations of the American workers towards

management, it also can be viewed as a symbol of America using its military “muscle” in affecting the outcome in political and economic matters in the competitive neoliberal environment of fin de siècle global capitalism.

***Moneyball* (2011): Post-Fordist Narratives in Post-Classical Sports Business Films**

Moneyball (2011), based on Michael Lewis’s novel of the same name, exists as an example of a post-classical Hollywood sports business film based on various generic and narrative elements derived from its predecessors. First of all, while the film devotes a great deal of screen time to baseball action, both through stock footage of real players and re-creations, and that the primary narrative focuses is on the business side of sports. In addition, most of the scenes take place in office settings and conference rooms rather than on the playing field, which is typical of other post-classical Hollywood sports business films. Also, much of the plot is devoted to conversations and scenarios relating to the business operations of professional baseball—contract discussions and trade deals, etc. between team managers, talent scouts, and other non-athlete characters. Also, athlete characters occupy mainly supporting roles in this film, which is another common trait *Moneyball* shares with other post-classical American sports business films. Finally and most important, the film’s protagonist is not an athlete, but rather the general manager for the Oakland Athletics, Billy Beane (Brad Pitt), who is based on the non-fictional historical figure.⁴⁹ As such, this establishes him as a typical non-athlete sports protagonist (NASP) stock character similar to past American sports business films such as *Jerry*

⁴⁹ Billy Beane was a first round draft pick who failed to live up to the expectations of the scouts, which is a major theme explored throughout *Moneyball*. Billy Beane’s back story provides information relating to his failed professional baseball career as a way to evoke pathos and provide narrative motivation for his desire to employ a new means of player selection, which improperly identified him as a top prospect. As a result, this narrative action helps to further qualify his character as a non-athlete and a definite representative of the business side of professional sports in line with the NASPs common in other post-classical Hollywood sports business films.

Maguire. All these traits help qualify *Moneyball* as emblematic of the post-classical American sports business film trend with popular appeal in Hollywood production into the 21st century.

What makes *Moneyball* a more sophisticated version of the post-classical Hollywood sports business film trend is the way it symbolically features, as a key part of the narrative, the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism in the world of professional baseball. As the overall economy shifted to more post-Fordist methods of operation as neoliberalism dominated the economic and political landscapes of contemporary global society, certain business sectors took longer to adapt than others. Among the many changes that occurred in the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism was re-defining the relationship between labor and management, which led to the liberalization of labor markets making labor more dispensable, disposable, and replaceable. Professional sports, particularly American baseball with its long-standing traditions, especially in the selection of player talent, maintained its traditional practices of talent scouting that operates consistent with long-standing Fordist concepts rather than the more innovative and flexible post-Fordist principles.

Moneyball consistently exhibits this shift through various narrative conflicts between Billy Beane and his assistant Peter Brand (Jonah Hill), representatives of the new methods of operation, and the group of veteran talent scouts who desperately adhere to the old ways of doing things. This contrast is initially featured during the first meeting between Billy Beane and his talent scouts in preparation for the upcoming season. In the previous scene, Beane meets with the team owner who informs him that he will have to work with limited budget. This means the Oakland A's will lose their best three players to free agency: Johnny Damon, Jason Giambi, and Jason Isringhausen. Entering the meeting with his talent scouts, he knows that the current way they select players will not allow them to replace the three superstars they lost with similar

talent. As the meeting progresses, the scouts discuss the qualities of the available players uttering the old jargon used to evaluate players in the traditional manner. They banter about players using phrases such as, “He looks like a Mantle or Mays, quite frankly,” “I like guys that got a little hair on their ass,” and “He’s got a baseball body.” The barrage of baseball clichés is broken when one of the scouts mentions a specific player to the group. The scout delivers his report indicating, “The guy’s an athlete: big, fast, talented, clean-cut, good looking face, nice jaw line, and a five-tools guy.” The other scouts agree with many of them saying, “He’s a good looking ball player.” When Beane asks if he is such good hitter, why doesn’t he hit better, they return to describing how good he looks as a ball player and that “he’s got a beautiful swing” and “the ball explodes off the bat” and “when he hits the ball, you can hear the sound of the bat all over the park.” Beane is unimpressed and shows greater resistance to the old scouts as they continue with their banter.

The inclusion of these phrases in this scene to describe potential players for the Oakland A’s helps call attention to the antiquated and unsystematic process of player selection employed by the veteran scouts and Major League Baseball overall. In the novel *Moneyball*, Michael Lewis elaborates on the colloquial jargon used by the talent scouts as part of the arbitrary but widely accept set of guidelines in identifying potential talent. Lewis indicates that Major League Baseball talent scouts use many such phrases to describe the body type of players, referring to them as “good looking” or “clean cut with a good jaw line” while identifying lack luster talent with terms such as “soft bodies” or “out of shape” (25). Lewis goes on to indicate that many older scouts describe their top prospects to their general managers not in terms of their past output but rather on their physicality, saying things like “This guy has a great body” or “This guy may be the best body in the draft” (31). Another important aspect of the traditional method of

scouting player is the “five-tool check list, which include the abilities to run, throw, field, hit, and hit with power” (Lewis 3). While the film likely oversimplifies the veteran scouts’ reliance on these concepts, it does illustrate the existing method of player talent evaluation based on subjective factors such as body type, attractiveness, and that the five-tool framework, all of which only provide speculation on their future performance based on the “gut feelings” of the talent scouts.

Frustrated by the lack of innovation and flexibility on the part of his veteran talent scouts, Billy Beane turns to a low level, college-educated executive with an economics degree from Yale by the name of Peter Brand (Jonah Hill)⁵⁰ from the Cleveland Indians to help him find a new way to evaluate talent. During their first encounter, Peter Brand expresses his own frustrations with the Cleveland Indians’ general manager who ignores his advice based on Brand’s new method of evaluating talent using statistics. Brand shares his ideas with Beane indicating “Baseball thinking is medieval” and that “they are asking all the wrong questions, and that if I say anything, I’m ostracized, I’m a leper.” Brand further piques Beane’s attention by saying, “When the Red Sox see Johnny Damon, they see a superstar worth \$7.5 million a year. When I see Johnny Damon, I see an imperfect understanding of where runs comes from,” calling back to his earlier statement that clubs need to think of buying runs rather than players to have a successful team. Brand further impresses Beane when he tells him, “I think it is a good thing you got [Johnny] Damon off your payroll, which opens all kinds of interesting possibilities.” Brand ultimately wins Beane’s respect and the job as assistant general manager of the Oakland Athletics during a subsequent phone conversation. Beane calls Brand in the middle of the night,

⁵⁰ The Peter Brand character is based on the real life figure by the name of Paul De’Podesta. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, De’Podesta specifically asked not to be named in the film, indicating he felt “uncomfortable in the idea of being typecast as a laptop-toting, Ivy League nerd who eschews traditional scouting and relies only on statistics in making decisions” (Costa, 2011).
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424053111903927204576573271216641158>

suspecting that Brand applied his method of statistical analysis to Billy Beane's career as a player, and asks for his candid opinion on whether or not he would draft him in the first round. Brand replies without hesitation that he would have taken him in 9th round and with no signing bonus. This particular bit of action is even more significant in that it follows a flashback scene illustrating the meeting Beane had with the New York Mets scouts telling him that they think he has all the five tools to become a Major League Baseball superstar, which culminates with the scout sliding a bonus check to Beane. The alliance struck between Billy Beane and Peter Brand stands as a representation of a post-Fordist re-conceptualization of Major League Baseball talent analysis that stands in sharp contrast to the veteran scouts' traditional method of player evaluation representative of Fordism.

Multiple references to the post-Fordist efficiency of Brand's productive output using his method of player evaluation occurs on the first day on the job with the Oakland A's. Initially, when Beane's visits Brand in his office on that day, he is surprised that Brand had already moved in all his items. In addition, Brand hands Beane a players report without Beane asking him for it. Beane turns to the first page of the report and tells him, "I asked you to evaluate three players. How many are in here?" Brand indicates that he did 51. As the scene progresses, Peter Brand's new method of player analysis is vividly illustrated through a montage, which is initiated when Beane asks Brand to explain an equation on the dry eraser board in his office. The first image in the montage is that of the equation itself, which reads " $\text{Runs Score}^2 / \text{Runs Score}^2 - \text{Run Allowed}^2 = \text{Win \%}$." Brand goes on to explain that, using this formula, he calculated that they need 99 games to make the post-season and need to score 814 runs while holding their opponents to less than 645 in order to achieve that win total. With Jonah Hill providing a monologue through voice-over narration, the ensuing montage features a series of images and video footage,

using the Ken Burns editing effect within each shot, of computer screens with computer code he wrote to perform the team's year-to-year projects and spreadsheet programs illustrating players' statistics. Over these images, Brand tells Beane, "Using the stats the way we read them, we'll find value in players no one else can see." The series of images then turns to Bill James's *1978 Baseball Abstract*, when Brand asserts, "Bill James and mathematics cut straight through that." Over the various images of Bill James' formulas, Brand tells Beane, "Of the 20,000 players for us to consider, I believe there is a championship team of 25 people that we can afford, because everyone else in baseball undervalues them."

The final part of the montage turns its attention to an example of Peter Brand's methods in action applied to an actual player by the name of Chad Bradford. Brand tells Beane that Bradford is one of many players other teams have overlooked that could benefit the Oakland A's in rebuilding their team. He explains that Bradford is one of the most overlooked players in baseball because of a perceived defect in his throwing motion. The scene cuts to video of Bradford's throwing motion, which is awkward in the way he contorts his elbow through his sidearm delivery to batters. Brand states, "Nobody in the big leagues cares about him because he looks funny," which calls attention to the way the veteran scouts emphasize how players look as part of their traditional evaluation process in contrast to Brand's empirically based approach. Images of Bradford's impressive stats flash across the screen, when Brand tells Beane, "This guy could not be just the best pitcher in our bullpen, but one of the effective relief pitchers in all baseball." Brand concludes his pitch by indicating the economic value of signing Bradford, "This guy should cost \$3 million a year. We can get him for \$237,000." This montage is effective in both illustrating the details of Peter Brand's new method of player evaluation and drawing a

clear line between this new method and the allegedly antiquated method of player selection employed by the majority of professional baseball as part of the film's narrative action.

The “Trouble” with *Moneyball*: Representations of Ageism in Contemporary Capitalism

An important dimension of neoliberalism and the globalization is its emphasis on knowledge economies. Walter Powell and Kaisa Snellman define the knowledge economy “As productions and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technological and scientific advance as well as equally rapid obsolescence” (201). Julie McMullin and Heather Dryburgh suggest, “The ‘new economy’ concept refers to changes in the way that paid work is conducted, due primarily to advances in information technology, and the innovative implementation of these technologies” (McMullin 4). Luis Suarez-Villa introduces the concept of “technocapitalism,” which he defines as “a new form of capitalism that is heavily grounded on corporate power and its exploitation of technological creativity...wherein the tangible resources of industrial capitalism in the form of raw materials and physical labor are thus replaced by intangibles such as research hardware, experimental designs, and talented individuals with creative aptitudes” (3-4). The overall emphasis on information technologies and the ability to use these technologies are critical elements of globalization both at the firm level and with individual workers navigating the contemporary neoliberal economic landscape.

One of the social consequences of the knowledge economy is an overriding sense of ageism and biases against older workers in the knowledge economy workplace. What qualifies someone as an “older worker” varies based on numerous factors. For instance, “women are considered older workers at younger ages than are men (qtd. in McMullin 7). If a job requires physical strength, co-ordination, or stamina, then workers may be defined as old at relatively

young ages” (McMullin and Dryburgh 9). According to Tarjia Tikkanen and Barry Nyhan, “Statisticians tend to take the age of 45 as the demarcation between being a younger (24-44 years) and older worker (45-64)” (10). McMullin and Dryburgh further assert, “The age at which a worker is considered old varies depending on the age structure of the occupational or industrial group. For instance, medical specialist or judges may not be consider older workers until they are well into their sixties, whereas information technology professionals may be considered old when they are in their forties” (McMullin 9). Discrimination towards older workers has become more common in the contemporary workplace in the knowledge economy. Research shows that many employers discourage the recruitment of older workers because they are not seen to be flexible enough for modern working life (Tikkanen and Nyhan 11). In these instances, older workers are seen to have shortcomings concerning information and communication technologies, and that older workers are less flexible in gaining new competencies to adapt to the changing working environments of the global economy” (Tikkanen 29). Regardless of the actual parameters defining the cut off age for what qualifies as person as an older worker, ageism is a significant issue affecting work place practices in terms of both economic and social biases in modern capitalist culture.

In this way, workplace ageism can be seen to serve as a generative mechanism in the appearance of certain themes and narrative elements in contemporary popular cinema. Two recent Hollywood films deal specifically with the issue of ageism in the workplace, *The Internship* (Shawn Levy, 2013), and *The Intern* (Nancy Meyers, 2015). In both films, the plots center on older workers attempting to adjust to the knowledge economy by competing with much younger, more technologically skilled workers. *The Intern*’s protagonist is a 70-year old retiree, Ben Whittaker (Robert De Niro), who chooses to re-enter the workplace due to being bored with

life in retirement. On the other hand, the protagonists from *The Internship*, Billy McMahon (Vince Vaughn) and Nick Campbell (Owen Wilson), both in their forties, are forced to compete with interns half their age with twice as much computer experience after being downsized from their salesmen jobs. While both films are light-hearted comedies, they explore issues of ageism in the contemporary workplace that has become a significant barrier for many older workers in the United States and worldwide attempting to adapt to the challenges posed by knowledge based economies in global capitalism.

Moneyball (2011) also addresses the issue of ageism as part of the film's subtext. One of the first references to ageism occurs in the montage wherein Peter Brand explains the benefits of his statistical method of player evaluation to Billy Beane on his first day as an employee for the Oakland A's. In that montage, Brand explains, "Players are overlooked for a variety of reasons and perceived flaws: age, appearance, personality." While Brand was referring to the players, the inclusion of "age" as one of the perceived flaws, it is also a tacit reference to ageism that occurs in all fields of endeavors extant in the contemporary knowledge economies of the modern capitalist work place.

Ageism is most vividly explored as a consistent theme throughout *Moneyball* in scenes featuring Billy Beane meeting with his veteran talent scouts. In their meetings, the mise-en-scene is designed to call attention to the age difference between the scouts and Brad Pitt's character. First of all, the physical appearance of the scouts marks them as elderly men in their sixties or seventies. Most of them have gray thinning hair or are balding, wear old-style eyeglasses, and have potbellies, all of which are accentuated through various close-ups of each scout as they deliver their reports. One of the scouts is obviously the oldest, as indicated by the deep wrinkles in his face and his hearing aid, the latter of which is always clearly in view when this particular

scout is shown or delivers lines of dialogue. Next, none of the scouts are shown using computers or any other type of digital technology. The conference table around which this meeting takes place is littered with dog-eared manuals, three-ring binders, and stacks of disorganized papers. The scouts themselves present their reports reading from legal pads with handwritten notes and are surrounded by dry eraser boards with the names of players on magnetic placards organized over an outline of a baseball diamond. Finally, when Billy Beane challenges them on their assessments of various players, the lead scout, Grady, defends his staff by telling him, “We’ve got a lot of experience and wisdom in this room. We’ve been doing this for a long time, so you need to have a little faith and let us do our job of replacing Giambi.”

Another scene drawing subtle attention to ageism in the workplace occurs when the head scout confronts Billy Beane about his objections to their new methods of talent evaluation. Grady starts off the conversation by saying, “Major League Baseball and its fans are going to be more than happy to throw you and Google boy under the bus if you keep doing what you are doing.” He continues, “You don’t put together a team with a computer. Baseball isn’t just numbers, it’s not science. If it was, anybody could do what we’re doing and they can’t. Because they don’t know what we know.” Grady then reminds Beane of the contrast in experience between Peter Brand and his group of experienced scouts. The reference “Google boy” and his objections to using a computer to select players for a baseball team are clear signs suggesting that Grady and his scouts are inflexible and unwilling to change their ways in light of the new technology that has been presented to them. Grady continues telling Beane, “You got a kid in there that’s got a degree in economics from Yale, and you’ve got a scout here with 29 years of baseball experience. You are listening to the wrong one.” When Beane tells Grady that he needs to adapt to the new working conditions, Grady responds, “You’re discounting what scouts have

done for 150 years. There are intangibles that only baseball people understand.” The entire performance delivered by Grady’s character is emblematic of the perceived inflexible qualities of older workers and helps reinforce this stereotype.⁵¹

As the dramatic tension between Beane and Grady escalates in this scene, Beane counters by saying, “You don’t have a crystal ball. You can’t look at a kid and predict his future any more than I can.” His continues by referring back to his experience as a highly touted Major League Baseball prospect who failed to live up to the scouts’ expectations, “I’ve been at those kitchen tables with you and listened to you tell parents, ‘when I know, I know. And when it comes to your son, I know.’ And you don’t.” Grady then tells him “Major League Baseball thinks the way I think” and levels a personal insult at Beane suggesting, “You’re never going to get another job after all this fails, and you’re going to have to explain to your daughter why you have to work at Dick’s Sporting Goods.” After a brief physical altercation, Beane fires Grady and storms off past the manager, who witnessed the exchange, and Grady leaves the room tells the manager in a sarcastic tone, “good luck, Art.” The scene culminates when Beane arrives at the break room down the hall where he finds a group of young employees in their twenties playing a video game. Beane calls out to one of them by the name of Kubota, asking him, “You’ve never played ball, right?” Kubota responds tremulously, “I played a little T-ball when I was a kid.” Beane then hires him on the spot as the new head scout for the Oakland A’s.

The final part of the scene is especially important in illustrating the inflexible qualities of older workers, embodied by Grady, in contrast with the younger, less experienced but more flexible employees with the Oakland A’s. The fact that the young employees are playing a video

⁵¹ While this is the common stereotype that portrays older workers as being less effective in the work place, according to Tikkanen and Nyhan, “results from studies suggest that while older workers skills and knowledge may be regarded as obsolete, they are also viewed as loyal and reliable; even more so than younger workers (Walker, 1997b)” (11).

game on their break calls even great attention to the lack of comfort in using computers associated with older workers. In addition, since Beane knows Kubota has no experience in professional baseball as a player and little as a sports executive, further supports the notion that younger workers are more willing to adapt than older workers. In this way, *Moneyball* subtly contributes to reinforcing the ageism stereotype of older workers being inflexible and ill-suited for the challenges faced by new information-based technologies in the knowledge economy of contemporary global capitalism.

On a final note, while *Moneyball* tells its story from the perspective of a general manager adopting new methods of player selection based on computer technology, the film *Trouble with the Curve* (Robert Lorenz, 2012), provides an opposite take on the issue of ageism. The main narrative of *Trouble with the Curve* is told from the perspective of an aging talent scout starring Clint Eastwood, with a much different outcome that praises the value of traditional methods of player selection in Major League Baseball. However, both of these films call attention to the topic of ageism in modern capitalist society regarding the dimension of the knowledge economy and the lack of perceived technological skills and computer aptitude of older workers. Moreover, issues of ageism in the contemporary work place can be seen to operate as generative mechanisms in the appearance and exploration of this concept in post-classical Hollywood sports business films.

Conclusion

The post-classical Hollywood sports business film has developed as a definite trend in modern popular film production. Building on the conventions of past sports films, developments in the post-classical Hollywood sports business film were and are driven by a wide range of economic, political, and social generative mechanisms from contemporary society and culture. Many of the representations and narrative elements in the post-classical Hollywood sports business film can be attributed to the spread of neoliberalism, free market philosophies, and the process of globalization in the latter part of the 20th century and into the new millennium.

The following sections in the conclusion initially summarize the results of this study relating to the commonalities among the post-classical Hollywood sports business films extensively analyzed along with other contemporary examples of post-classical Hollywood sports business films mentioned in passing. Concurrently, this study also positions two stages of developments in post-classical Hollywood sports business films, which coincide with specific economic, social and aesthetic generative mechanisms brought on by the spread of neoliberalism and the emergence of free market capitalism as dominate forces in globalization. Next, themes relating to a re-imagination of the American Dream from the perspective of hegemonic masculinity in neoliberal philosophies are explored as pervasive themes in the post-classical Hollywood sports business films examined in this study. Finally, sites of future study applying the overriding theoretical lens in examining post-classical Hollywood sports business films are identified to films dealing with the confluence between global capitalism and American sports, specifically *Million Dollar Arm* (Craig Gillespie, 2014) and sports business films produced outside the United States such as *United Passions* (Frédéric Auburtin, 2014).

Common Elements and Themes in Post-Classical Hollywood Sports Business Films

As this study has shown, a series of common traits mark the post-classical Hollywood sports business film trend. The most common element among the post-classical Hollywood sports business film is its primary narrative focus on the business side of professional team sports. While this is the most elementary distinction between the two eras of sports films, it is significant in that it coincides with the growth of free market capitalism and the emergence of free agency in professional sports at that time in history as generative mechanisms in the appearance of elements devoted specifically to the business side of sports. This is evident in films such as *Bang the Drum Slowly* (John D. Hancock, 1973), *North Dallas Forty* (Ted Kotcheff, 1979), etc..

When concepts of American professional team sports operations appeared in classical Hollywood sports film, they were featured as secondary narrative elements, and little screen time was devoted to matters of business in the world of team sports. In the majority of classical Hollywood sports business films examined in this study, ideas of patriotism and achieving the American Dream through athletic competition dominated films such as *Pride of the Yankees* (Sam Wood, 1942), and *The Jackie Robinson Story* (Alfred E. Green, 1950) among others. Themes relating to the business side of American professional team sports appeared as unique developments during the classical era of sports film production with a few examples such as *It Happened in Flatbush* (Ray McCarey, 1942) and *Easy Living* (Jacques Tourneur, 1949); however, narratives devoted almost exclusively to the business side of professional team sports began as a specific trend in the early stage of the New Hollywood Movement with the film *Number One* (Tom Gries, 1969) as with greater frequency in post-classical Hollywood sports

business films such as *Slap Shot* (George Roy Hill, 1977), *North Dallas Forty* (Ted Kotcheff, 1979), *Major League* (David S. Ward, 1989) among others as an initial stage of development.

The corporate villain, which was a common trend in all genres of American films from the late 1960s to the 1980s such as *Executive Action* (David Miller, 1973), *The Parallax View* (Alan J. Pakula, 1974), *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleisher, 1973) *Three Days of the Condor* (Sydney Pollack, 1975), *Network* (Sidney Lumet, 1976), *Capricorn One* (Peter Hyams, 1977), *The China Syndrome* (James Bridges, 1979), and *They Live* (John Carpenter, 1988) became an increasingly more significant part of the narrative action in sport films. Films produced during this same period such as *Number One* (David Moessinger, 1969), *Rollerball* (Norman Jewison, 1975), *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars & Motor Kings* (John Badham, 1976), *Slap Shot* (George Roy Hill, 1977), *Semi-Tough* (Michael Ritchie, 1977), *North Dallas Forty* (Ted Kotcheff, 1979), *The Natural* (Barry Levinson, 1984), *Eight Men Out* (John Sayles, 1988), *Major League* (David S. Ward, 1989), and *A League of Their Own* (Penny Marshall, 1992) all feature some form of corporate antagonists in direct conflict with the primary athlete protagonists.

The concept of the corporate antagonist became less significant with American sports business film produced in the 1990s and 2000s, where filmic corporate entities were either portrayed as indifferent or absent to the actions of the main non-athlete sports protagonists. For instance, in post-classical Hollywood sports business films such as *Any Given Sunday* (Oliver Stone, 1999)⁵², *The Replacements* (Howard Deutch, 2000), *Moneyball* (Bennett Miller, 2011),

⁵² *Any Given Sunday* features a confrontational owner, Christina Pagniaci (Cameron Diaz) who stands in opposition to the veteran head coach, Tony D'Amato (Al Pacino), as he struggles to survive in the modernized world of professional football; however, Christina Pagniaci is presented not so much as an overly simplified corporate villain evident in many post-classical Hollywood film, but more as an ambitious, forward thinking business person who is attempting to establish herself as a respected member of the male-dominated realm of team ownership in the league. As a result, her business actions sometimes run in conflict with Tony D'Amato's goals as head coach.

Draft Day (Ivan Reitman, 2014), and *Million Dollar Arm* (Craig Gillespie, 2014), the corporate antagonist, in the form of team owners or managers, are primarily non-factors or only moderately inhibitive as supporting characters to the actions of the NASPs in achieving their goals in the main narrative action of these films.

Post-classical American sports business films produced from the mid 1990s to the 2000s feature a non-athlete sports protagonist (NASP) instead of positing an athlete as the film's main character. The main economic and social generative mechanisms driving the appearance of NASP instead of athletes in post-classical Hollywood sports business films are attributed to the infiltration of neoliberal philosophies relating to the importance of individual action and individual responsibility as the guiding force in modes of conduct in contemporary capitalism. Moreover, this is a major point of distinction between classical and post-classical Hollywood sports business films, especially because athletes tend to take on either supporting or adversarial roles as antagonists often in conflict with the non-athlete sports protagonists. *Jerry Maguire* is one of the most high-profile examples of the NASP in post-classical Hollywood sports business films, which set the tone in subsequent American sports business film productions. The non-athlete sports protagonist became a more common character type in popular Hollywood sports films such as *Any Given Sunday* (Oliver Stone, 1999), *Moneyball* (Bennett Miller, 2011), *Draft Day* (Ivan Reitman, 2014), and *Million Dollar Arm* (Craig Gillespie, 2014).

Finally, without exception, the non-athlete sports protagonists in all the post-classical Hollywood sports business film analyzed in this study are cast as white males in the form of coaches, general managers, sports agents, or representatives of the business side of professional American sports. While people of color and women are prominently featured in most post-classical Hollywood sports business films, they almost exclusively occupy supporting roles to

assist the white male NASPs in achieving their narrative goals. This particular demographic element of the NASPs in post-classical Hollywood sports business film is important in how these films operate as a re-imagination of the American Dream from the perspective of white male hegemony in reestablishing its dominance in modern global society, which will be explored in the following section of the conclusion.

Re-Imagination of the American Dream in Post-Classical Hollywood Sports Films

Once considered “box office poison,” Hollywood sports films, especially those with an emphasis on the business side of professional sports, now exist as the perfect tonic in providing a re-imagination of the American Dream in the spirit of neoliberalism in popular culture. Howard Nixon’s *Sports and the American Dream* (1984) provides insights into the connection between the American Dream and organized sport in American Culture. Nixon “identifies the existence of a dominant view of American sports that includes: superior development and demonstration of qualities of character, discipline, competitiveness, physical and mental fitness, religiosity, and nationalism” (21). Nixon continues regarding the connection between sport and the American Dream by arguing:

The pursuit of the American Dream of achievement, mobility, and success continues to be a major driving force in the lives of the majority of Americans...sport seems the ideal vehicle for understanding the pursuit of the American Dream both because achievement and success are so openly and explicitly emphasized in sport, and because the rags to riches story so often seems to be told by the contemporary mass media with sports figures as the main characters. (6-10)

While Nixon was referring to the contemporary mass media during the 1980s, this concept is even more fitting in the 21st century as the quintessential connection between propagating the

myth of the American Dream in sports narratives, either through live sporting events or fictional films or television programs focusing on sports.

While equal opportunity and reward for hard work may have been pathways to success for past generations of American, the contemporary reality is that advancement in the United States is determined more by heredity and social advantage than most other factors. Through the introduction of neoliberalism and free market economics in the United States starting in the 1980s, the American Dream has become increasingly more difficult for the average citizen to attain. The systematic dismantling of the social safety net established by the New Deal after the Great Depression, the decline in the power of organized labor, tax cuts for the rich, privatization of public services, and other developments implemented by proponents of neoliberal economics in the latter half of the twentieth-century have all led to one of the greatest income disparities between the top 1% and the rest of Americans in United States history. Sean Crosson cites numerous scholars and studies that support this reality.⁵³ Crosson further asserts, citing the U.S. Census Bureau's 2011a report, "Successive studies have indicated that far from opportunity and equality existing in the United States, the opposite is actually the case, while the number living in poverty is now at an all-time high of 15.1 percent, equivalent to of 46 million Americans" (68). Paul Buchheit claims that "each year since the [2009] recession America's richest 1 percent have made more than the cost of all social programs in the United States" and that "almost none of the new 1 percent wealth led to innovations or new jobs" as predicted by free market economists (Buchheit 2014). In light of all these studies, the harsh reality for the vast majority of Americans

⁵³ Fred Black's et al 2006 article in the journal *Contexts*, "The Compassion gap in American poverty policy. Toby Miller's 2006 article from *Cultural Politics* "A risky society of moral panic: The US in the twenty-first century." Earl Smith's *Race, Sport and the American Dream* (2009). Emmanuel Saez's study through the Institute for Research and Labor Employment at the University of California, Berkley titled "Striking it Richer: The Evolution of top incomes in the United States." Congressional Budget Office's 2011 report "Trends in the Distribution of Household Income Between 1979-2007" (68).

is that they have almost no chance of achieving the American Dream through the virtues of hard work, dedication, and individual achievement without the benefit of nepotism or capricious luck. More importantly, this trend is likely to worsen in the near future as the progenitors of these wealthy individuals will inherit their parent's wealth, thereby making it even more difficult for the average citizen to achieve the American Dream through hard work and individual accomplishment alone.

However, contrary to all the evidence, many Americans still hold onto the concepts of the American Dream ideology as axiomatic truths in defining the parameters of their own success, especially in terms of the individual effort and responsibility narrative promoted by neoliberalism. This perception is supported by a 2014 survey conducted by the Pew Charitable Trusts indicating, "68% of those [Americans] polled believe that they are in control of the financial situation...and [that] individual attitudes and attributes are considered more important than family background, race, gender or the economy as reasons people get ahead."⁵⁴ Given all the evidence to support the extreme difficulties in achieving the American Dream through individual effort alone, it begs the question, why do so many American still ardently believe in the efficacy of the American Dream as a viable pathway to success? According to J. Emmett Winn, "the American Dream is entrenched in American popular culture [where] books, movies, TV shows and songs continually communicate it to a receptive audience" (1). Hollywood, known colloquially as the "Dream Factory," has always been and remains one of the most consistent and effective avenues through which to promote the American Dream in popular culture. It takes little effort to identify a plethora of Hollywood films that embody the Horatio

⁵⁴ Economic Mobility Project, "*Economic Mobility and the American Dream: Where Do We Stand in the Wake of the Great Recession*." The Pew Charitable Trusts, 19 May 2014. Web. 07 Nov. 2014.

Alger's rags-to-riches narrative dating back to the earliest days of American cinema, and this narrative trope is evident in many contemporary Hollywood films.

Sports films especially have operated and still operate as powerful vehicles in framing and propagating constructions of the American Dream ideology. Historically, the Hollywood sports film has consistently created narratives that support the concept of the American Dream at different stages in United States history. In addition, it can be asserted that the development of the American sports business film is culturally significant in being an indicator of both personal and national identification in relation to achievement of the American Dream. Moreover, the post-classical Hollywood sports business films chosen for textual analysis in this study operate as convincing, albeit overly simplified, narrative representations of hard work and individual effort as the best pathway to achieve the mythical American Dream.

One of the most effective ways to instill the plausibility of the American Dream in conjunction with neoliberal philosophies is to spread both that idea and practice of neoliberalism in contemporary society through a wide range of mass media texts (Steger and Roy 11). Steger and Roy add, "Advocates for neoliberalism skillfully interact with the media to sell their preferred version of a free-market world to the public, and portray globalizing markets...including anti-unionization drive in the name of enhancing productivity and labor flexibility...in a positive light as an indispensable tool for the realization for a better world" (11-14). Focusing on the post-classical American sports business film selected for this study, the analysis concentrates primarily on the ideological dimension of free market/neoliberal economics and the ways in which these films subtly extol the benefits of free market capitalism and the cultural virtues of neoliberal philosophies.

As such, this study has focused on the importance of popular culture texts, specifically post-classical Hollywood sports business films, in helping sustain the status quo in modern capitalist cultures in support of free market/neoliberal philosophies through mass media. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony, the narratives and various representations in these American sports business films can be seen to operate as a part of a larger system of non-coercive social control. Carl Boggs supports this concept by indicating in his 1976 text *Gramsci's Marxism*:

A crucial concept in this respect for Gramsci was cultural hegemony, which referred to the maintenance and control of one social class over another, often through the diffusion of a complete system of beliefs, ethics, values, and ways of thinking throughout particular societies that ultimately becomes the "organizing principle" that support the ruling elite and become accepted as the prevailing "common sense." (39)

According to Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea, "Gramsci observed 'common sense' is not something rigid and immutable, but it is continually transforming itself" (9). In this way, Hall and O'Shea suggest that this ideological battle is an ongoing site of contestation between the ruling class and their subordinates. Ideological control, in opposition to direct domination through coercive forces such as the police or military, is much more effective as a means of social control in that people give their consent to the systems that ultimately contribute to their repression (Gramsci 1971). Drawing on Gramsci's concept of ideological control, John Fiske suggests:

Consent must be constantly won and re-won for the people's material social experience constantly reminds them of the disadvantages of subordination and thus poses a threat to the dominant class...hegemony...posits a constant contradiction between ideology and the

social experience of the subordinate that makes this interface an inevitable site of ideological struggle. (Allen et al 291)

Applying these concepts of hegemony, the post-classical Hollywood sports business films examined in this study can be seen to operate as part of a larger system of ideological influence through mass media in promulgating and romanticizing the basic elements of free market and neoliberal philosophies in contemporary capitalist society.

One of the most essential elements of these philosophies, the concept of personal responsibility in favor of collective action as the primary mechanism through which people can succeed in modern capitalist society, is a common trend and potent narrative theme in all the American sports business film examined in this study. In addition, film narratives focusing on what Deborah Tudor refers to as a “return to social stability based in a largely white patriarchy...which normalizes white neoliberal masculinity,” which is considered a natural state in modern capitalist cultures, especially in the United States, is another dominate theme in these sports films (qtd. in Kapur and Wagner 59-60). Consequently, post-classical American sports business film operate as sites of narrative escapism that offer a mythic glimmer of hope in achieving the “American Dream” through individual effort, despite the actual hardships created by free market philosophies, such as growing income inequalities between the ultra rich and average citizens pervasive in contemporary society that make achieving this so-called dream, as outlined by neoliberal philosophies, nearly impossible for most people to attain.

Potential Sites of Analysis Regarding the Business Side of Sports Films and Television

While this study has identified and examined a wide range of post-classical Hollywood sports business, there are several other sites of analysis using the same methodological approach and theoretical perspective regarding the development of sports business films as an ongoing

trend. For example, *Secretariat* (Randall Wallace, 2010), the horseracing biopic of the famous eponymous winning horse, is a potential object of future study because its narrative concentrates on the concept of inherited wealth in modern capitalism. In addition, *Secretariat* delivers an idealized and over-simplified representation of the benefits of trickle-down economics through the main character, played by Diane Lane, operating as a beneficent person of wealth in running her business and taking care of her employees in the process. *Draft Day* is another potential popular American sports film for future study in that it features the quintessential Hollywood actor as athlete, Kevin Costner, star of numerous American sports films, no longer in the role of athlete-hero but as the film's protagonist in the form of the general manager of the Cleveland Browns. *Draft Day* can be seen as an important site of study in that it signifies a monumental shift from Kevin Costner's iconic status as the athlete hero in American film culture to a non-athlete representative of professional sports team ownership as the film's primary hero.

Million Dollar Arm is particularly well suited as a site of analysis concentrating on the effects of globalization and neoliberalism by the ways in which the film explores exploitation of undeveloped markets, outsourcing of cheap labor, and a figurative reestablishment of American white male hegemony in contemporary global capitalist society. *The Hunger Games* (Gary Ross, 2012) is another potential site of analysis focusing on the role of sporting events in supporting neoliberal principles in a dystopian future dominated by a draconian global capitalist society. Much like *Rollerball* (Norman Jewison 1975), *The Hunger Games*, a hybrid science fiction/sports genre film, exists as a criticism of mass media's pervasive influence in extolling the benefits of free market capitalism, despite its inherent inequalities, by providing spectacle sporting entertainment as forms of mass distraction and social control in its futuristic authoritarian corporate society. While issues of gender and race were explored in this study's

analysis of *Jerry Maguire*, a more in-depth analysis of these dimensions to *Jerry Maguire* and other post-classical Hollywood sports business films mentioned in this study is warranted. Films such as *A League of Their Own* (Penny Marshall, 1992), *Love and Basketball* (Gina Prince-Bythewood, 2000), and *Whip It* (Drew Barrymore, 2009) exist as potential sites of analysis focusing on issues of feminism and race, and how these concepts are represented and explored in popular Hollywood cinema as new forms of commodification and exploitation in neoliberal global capitalism.

Another potential site of analysis following the same methodological approach and theoretical construction center on examining sports business films and television programs produced outside the United States. For instance, *United Passions* (Frédéric Auburtin, 2014), a French biopic about the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and the World Cup, epitomizes numerous elements of the post-classical Hollywood sports business film trend. Along with *United Passions* exploring the financial developments of FIFA as one of the world's most famous sports league, it also focuses on the business exploits of the notorious Joseph "Sepp" Blatter who served as the eighth president of FIFA from 1998 to 2015, as a quintessential non-athlete sports film protagonist indicative of the post-classical sports business film trend. The non-American sports business film produced during the 1990s that epitomizes many of the above-mentioned thematic elements and character variations worth mentioning is *Net Worth* (Jerry Ciccoritti, 1995). This Canadian Made-for-television film based on a true story from the National Hockey League (NHL) in the 1950s recounts the events that led to the formation of the NHL Players Association. *Net Worth* features both a non-athlete SBA character, Jack Adams, manager of the Detroit Red Wings, and multiple scenarios involving historic hockey players, such as "Terrible Ted" Lindsay and Gordie Howe, negotiation their contracts with team

management as part of the main narrative. As such, examining *Net Worth* through a similar socio-historic lens is a fitting site of future analysis in support of the sports business film trend developing outside mainstream Hollywood production.

Sports documentary films such as Billy Corben's contribution to ESPN's *30 for 30* series *Broke* (2012) that explores the financial difficulties faced by many former professional athletes are also potential objects of study following this approach. Yet another potential site of future study relates to a wide range of American sports business themed television programs produced during the 1980s-2000s, as outlined by Alvin Marrill's *Sports on TV* (2009). For instance, popular American sports television programs such as HBO's *Arli\$\$* (1996-2002), which centers on the activities of colorful sports agent, much in the same vein as *Jerry Maguire* (1996) and ABC's *Sports Night* (1998-2000), a sitcom providing a behind-the-scenes look at a fictitious sports talk show with obvious references to ESPN's *SportsCenter*, both figure as sites of potential analysis.

Ultimately, by examining more sites of filmic and televisual analysis in this manner, it will help demonstrate that American sports business films serve as fitting cultural artifacts regarding the introduction, spread, and solidification of many of the concepts of free market economics and neoliberalism as pervasive and laudable elements in the twenty-first century American zeitgeist. As more sports business films emerge in popular culture, along with television programs and other forms of short format video productions devoted to the business side of sports appear with greater in contemporary popular culture, the effects of generative mechanism such as globalization and neoliberal philosophies can be examined as popular mass media text exhibiting the social, economic, and political changes yet to come in both the world of professional sports and popular cinema.

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